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PUNCH

GEORGE BARKSDALE, M.D.

RD 315

PUNCH
A Novel of Negro Life



PUNCH

A Novel of Negro Life

BY

GEORGE BARKSDALE, M. D.

New York and Washington
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY
1904

KD 315

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JULY 10 1940

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CHAPTER I.

THE HAPPY HOME.

"Aw Punch! Punch!"

"Marm," answered a childish voice from the depths of a gully not far from its owner's home.
"Whut yo' doin' in dat gully, seh? Eetin' du't ag'in? Yass, yo' lil' black debble yo'. Cum outer dar dis minit 'fo' I cum dar an' tyar ev'y rag er clo'se off'n yo'. Cum out, I say!"

The victim of his mother's wrath slowly quitted his place in the gully and came sidelong toward where she stood in the characteristic attitude of a provoked negress, her arms akimbo, and standing very straight. The boy stopped before coming within reaching distance of his mother, for, young as he was, he well knew how she could punish him. He wisely dared not go too close therefore, for he was also aware that she could not catch him if he had three paces start.

"Didn' I tol yo' not ter eet du't no mo'?"

"Yass'm."

"Whut mek yo' do hit, den?"

"'Ka'se."

Punch evidently thought this a valid excuse as not only he alone, but every mother's daughter gives it as the most profound reason for doing any act that the mind prompts the will to do. He stood there before his mother in the burning sun of a scorching July day, his feet half buried and wriggling in the loose and powdery earth, first on one foot and then the other to relieve each in turn of the duty of supporting his little black body. The

boy wore no hat, and in consequence his hair, which was in the tightest of tight kinks, and looking for all the world as if it had never been combed since his life began, was bleached by the sun to the color of red oak bark across his forehead and around the edge of his hair. His skin was so black that the dingy yellow-brown shirt that he wore intensified his blackness until his countenance became an exaggerated midnight. He was clad simply in this single loose garment, which had once been white, but owing to infrequent washings had rapidly become the color of the gully in which he was first introduced to the reader.

The boy's eyelashes were powdered with fine dust, and about his mouth were muddy streaks, evidence, in fact, that he had frequently disobeyed the injunction of his mother.

"Whar' John an' Sue?" asked his mother, exasperated.

"Dar in de gully."

"Bring 'em heah, yo' imp er Sat'n. Didn't I tol' yo' not let dem chillun eet du't; an' heah dey dun et so much I 'spec' dey gwine buss'. Bring 'em heah, I say."

The boy avoided, by his nimbleness, a slap from his mother, who in failing to find the anticipated resistance came very near falling, and with difficulty regained her equilibrium, with a grunt.

"Yo' nummin', jes' wait twell night," said she to herself, promising no doubt that when bedtime came she would surely punish her recreant progeny for the deeds done during the day. So with a mysterious shake of her head she passed into the house.

The boy, who was scarcely more than six years old, ran down to the gully, and recklessly fell headlong therein alongside his two companions. He being the oldest of the three had, as is the custom among negroes, been given the task of minding his brother who was two years old, and his sister about four.

"Cum on son," he said to his brother, who stretched out his arms to come. His face had been well plastered with red clay in his ineffective efforts to put into the orifice customarily used for food, and for which he had as frequently mistaken his eyes or his ears, and the result was indeed grotesque, for he presented the appearance of having had his toilet made for some infantile carnival.

Taking the baby upon his hip, which is the usual method for child-nurses to carry their burdens, he struggled out of the gully, and bidding his sister go to the house, he followed, laboriously bearing his baby brother. It is perhaps needless to say that Punch's brother was not even so well clothed as our hero; in fact, he was nothing like as well garbed, and his innocence became him well. Having reached the house, Punch quietly put the baby to the ground, which treatment the little imp resented in a loud voice, and showed his dislike by crying, and scrambling, as fast as his bowed legs would carry him, toward the open door, where a pet pig was basking in the sun which streamed in a blazing spot upon the floor. The pig fearing no harm, declined to be aroused by the turmoil, but opened his eyes widely, gave a grunt of satisfaction, or protest, it is not definitely known which, and promptly fell asleep again. Several chickens, young and old, scurried off on the entrance of the child. When that interesting individual had gotten to his feet again after climbing in the doorway, he waddled to his mother, who was cooking her husband's dinner, and at the moment of the child's entrance was just about to throw an ash-cake into the nicely cleaned hearth, when she heard and became conscious of its presence.

"Punch, cum heah an' git dis chile. Whut yo' let him git 'way fum yo' fer? Don' yo' see I'se gittin' dinner?"

Punch, who had ardently hoped to be free from

minding his brother for awhile, reluctantly crept into the house and half-heartedly said:

"Cum heah, son; don' cry. Cum on."

The child immediately hushed his crying, and toddled across the room to where Punch had fallen listlessly upon the bare pine floor. They began playing, but the intense heat of the day soon overcame even their animal spirits, and they went fast asleep, oblivious of the swarms of flies, the proximity of the pig, or the prowling chickens, who in their audacity plucked flies from the faces of the sleeping children.

Sue had come in unseen by her mother, and made her presence known first by her plaintive pleading, "Mammy, gimme sum brade; mammy, mammy, gimme sum brade," when seeing the preparation for dinner being made. After repeating her demands for bread something less than a score of times, her mother turned sharply around and asked what she wanted. On again being tormented by frequent repetitions of "brade," "brade," her mother went over to the container of edibles of the negro cabin, which is called a "cubbud," and took therefrom a cold ash-cake of the baking of the night before, broke off a generous piece, and gave it to the child. She seized it with hungry avidity and began eating it. The dryness of the bread produced thirst, and she began begging for "wawoo," but her mother, busied about her dinner, thought only of this. The child becoming impatient, spied a tin basin with water in it on the floor, and lying down began drinking the water intended for the chickens. The quiet aroused the mother's suspicions, and looking about for the child, saw her drinking the chickens' water. She snatched away the basin and caught the child up in her arms and kissed her, saying:

"Bless her li'l heart, did mammy fergit her chile?
Why d'n't my baby ax' fer water?"

She replaced the child upon the floor, who

promptly finished the piece of bread, and as speedily went to sleep.

Polly Brooks, the mother of Punch, and of nine other children, was just past thirty years of age, and was as black as all her children. Her stature was low, and her form had lost its comeliness owing to the change of physique produced by a most too ample accumulation of fat, and the natural ageing produced in any woman who has borne so many children. Nevertheless, her face was rotund, her eyes a dark brown, her nose flattened in the proverbial manner, and her mouth a rather small one, which the owner was rarely seen to keep closed. She was either talking, or singing, or laughing the whole of her waking hours, and these were the major number of the twenty-four.

While the language to her children and the tone in which it was spoken would lead the casual observer to believe that Polly was a vixen and a harsh and brutal mother, such, however, was not the case, for beneath the seeming rough exterior ran a chord of maternal love that was as strong as life itself. When smiling, Polly displayed a mouthful of splendid teeth, and when provoked to outright laughter she would double up in the middle, stretch her hands above her head and fall into the nearest chair, upon the bed, or even on the hard floor, giving vent meantime to peal after peal of jolly laughter that set anybody in a good humor to watch her.

Polly's hands were small, and her tapering fingers, once handsome, were now blunted by the very hard work which she had to do, which included everything, from doing the family laundry to plowing in the field.

Her love of ornamentation led her to wear a brass band ring on one of her fingers, and a pair of brass earrings, set with red coral, in her ears. Her feet were small and bare, and not being squeezed into smaller shoes were well formed. She was simply

clothed in a checked gingham dress made in a single piece, and about her head she wore a red handkerchief tied like a turban.

Such was Polly.

In the preparation of dinner Polly had just cut six or eight slices of smoked middling, that she took from the meal barrel, which was the repository for both bread and meat. Placing the sliced bacon in a skillet on a pile of live coals before the open fire, for stoves were rare in those days, it soon gave rise to the appetizing odor characteristic of this fried food, and which pervaded the whole interior of the cabin. By the time the meat had fried, several enormous ash-cakes were carefully raked out of the ashes with the hickory stick which was used in place of a poker. Dusting each by striking it sharply several times with her open hand, and blowing away the finer particles, she went to the door, and taking a dipper, made of a gourd, full of water, fresh and sparkling from the spring, she dexterously washed the several cakes and piled them one on top the other in a coarse earthenware plate, and placed it in the center of a rough pine table which occupied one side of the room. Dinner was now ready, except the buttermilk, which had not been brought from the neighboring spring, and for which she feared to leave the cabin lest the chickens, or the cat, or the dog, would get upon the table, for all were alike in being hungry, so she paused, and then caught up an old conch shell and blew a wind upon it that sent the welcome though discordant news to the hard-worked husband, in the field of corn nearby, that dinner was ready.

The sound of the horn awakened the children, and it was not long before each was clamoring for some "brade."

"Punch, go an' git dat jug er milk fum de spring," commanded his mother.

Punch obeyed this time with alacrity, and scampering down the path as fast as he could go, he

took the jug of milk out of a box provided for such articles, and let down the lid with a bang—for boys are noted for making more noise in accomplishing any single thing than twice as many grown up people. He started back with the jug, but it was so large—the boy and the jug being so nearly equal in size—he found it a difficult task. The boy tried to put it on his head as he had seen his mother do, but he could not get it a foot high; and so, taking it between his legs, he waddled along like a duck until the house was reached after many stops to rest by the wayside.

His mother met him at the door and took the heavy jug from him with the words of approval, "dat's right, son." These were the only words of thanks he ever got from his mother, and they always made him exceedingly proud. The meal was now ready after the addition of the milk. And the husband and father having arrived, he called to Punch to pour water for him to wash his hands, which being done, he dried them, not on a towel, but by rapidly swinging his hands back and forth in the thirsty air, and in a few seconds they were clean and dry, and no towel to be washed afterwards.

John Brooks may be described as a typical negro and was probably thirty-five years of age. Doubt is expressed because negroes are notoriously careless about making births and deaths subjects of record. He was of medium height, well formed, and powerful. His head was very large, and his brow receded, as is usual in the Ethiopian; but his forehead was unusually extensive, being so much so that it encroached upon the scalp in two projections resembling the heels of a horse's shoe. His face was kindly, and when he spoke was lighted up with exceeding intelligence. His beard was scanty, and very black and glossy, as was his hair. Contrary to his wife, he was not talkative, nor given to venting his feeling either of happiness or

grief, except upon great occasions, so that his stoicism resembled the Mongolian.

His dress was simply a hickory shirt and a pair of jeans "britches," as he would have called them, supported by a single "gallus" made of white cloth. His feet were bare, and he had removed his hat, which was a home-made one, of straw, and placed it beside him, while he pulled a four-legged bench to the table and seated himself. No knives or forks were at his plate, and this article, of which there were but two in the house, was cracked across, while the only sound one held the bread.

"Git up, Punch, an' sop sum gravy, an' daddy'll gi' yo' er piece meat pres'n'y."

Caring no more for the uses of a plate than for a damask table cloth, nor for a knife or fork either, for he would have discarded them as useless, would our Punch, he took the piece of bread that his father gave him and industriously sopped in the skillet, that had been removed but recently from the fire, occasionally burning his fingers in the hot grease that had not yet finished sputtering.

The mother and the two younger children did not come to the table, for, obedient to a strange custom, they awaited in hungry impatience for the husband and father to finish his meal, except now and then the fretting of Susan was occasionally stopped by her father giving her a piece of bread, which she ate seated upon the floor. When she ceased biting her bread for an instant, and was not looking, a roguish chicken would give it a peck that would exasperate the child beyond measure, and she would cry, "Shoo, yo' bad ole fing," and hastily snatching up the most convenient missile, she would hurl it at the chickens until they fled in defeat. The meal being finished by father and son, they lazily leave the table, and mother and younger children make their meal upon the food left.

No banquet, however sumptuous, could have tempted the appetite of an onlooker more than

watching the consumption of this simple meal by the unsophisticated negro and his son. The zest given for the food was whetted by conscientious labor, hard as it was long. Good health, ignorance of the ambition of the worldly-wise, and the fear of the Almighty made his meal, though simple, palatable, healthful and satisfying. Could any of us, if we traveled the wide world over and tasted the delights of our most exalted ambition, and drunk deeply of the secret depths of Knowledge, have enjoyed a meal half so much? Few there are but would answer, No. The log cabin in which this simple family dwelt was similar to thousands of others scattered throughout Virginia and the South, and which have been pointed at by visitors in derision. The question has been asked, Why do the Southern people still continue to build habitations after the manner of pig sties, instead of sanitary and neat frame houses, built of sawed timber, and have them either painted or white washed?

This question may be replied to by asking, Why do the French still continue to build their farm houses of stone found close by, and to thatch the roofs with straw? Simply because the custom prevails, the materials are close at hand and are cheap—and that is just why negro log cabins are so plenteous.

When log cabins were all the houses found in the country, except the scattered mansions of the very rich, logs were to be had for nothing; in fact, those who desired them would frequently be paid for cutting them. No saw-mills existed, and all the lumber used was sawed by hand, which was a slow, tedious, and expensive process. Granting this were not so, the expensive sawed lumber, even if the mills existed; the want of transportation, the absence of roads, and the poverty of the prospective house-builder denied him a more costly if less picturesque home.

Within sight of his proposed home in the primitive forests of Virginia, with no other tools than an ax and a saw, the poorest negro could find abundant material wherewith to build himself a home. With the assistance of a neighbor, had the builder no sons, a few days cutting, logs of oak or pine yielded enough material to build the four walls of a single-room house. If no better means existed, two men could "tote" the logs, already squared, and notched at either end; and sometimes if the owner was particularly exquisite they would be hewn on two sides.

The walls were begun by laying a larger sill than the rest upon stones, which elevated it, when finished, about twelve or fifteen inches above ground, serving in consequence the purpose of shelter for dogs, hogs, and chickens, that would frequently fight amongst themselves, much to the discomfort and annoyance of their masters above.

The door was simply a hole left in one side, which was usually so low as to necessitate even a person of low stature stooping in passing to and fro. The door-facing was of roughly-hewn boards, or a log split in twain and nailed to the cut off end of the logs, or holes were bored and wooden pins driven in.

The window was simply a hole a foot or two square, unglazed, and kept open except in the severest weather, and closed by a sliding shutter and fastened with a wooden pin.

The chimney was a wonder. Built of wood, it was a miracle that it did not catch on fire every day in the year and a dozen times a day. Is it the irony of fate when the modern fireproof hotel burns like a torch and these wooden chimneys stand half a century of constant use? It was built of roughly-hewn logs like the walls, and the fireplace was very wide, often as much as six feet or more. To prevent the chimney from falling, several of the upper logs were trimmed at the end and thrust through

the crevices between the logs just above the fireplace, where a wooden pin inserted through a hole in the end served to hold them fast.

The fireplace and hearth were of rough stones, the whole being plastered with red clay, which, upon baking, became as hard and as lasting as brick.

The upper part of the chimney was built of riven sticks of pine or oak, which were fastened together with the same kind of plaster, as that which filled the crevices in the walls of the room. This strange chimney was built above the roof, but in many instances stopped short a foot or so, the topmost sticks being held in position by four heavy stones.

The roof and gable ends were usually closed in with slabs, or rough boards, these slabs being rough, flattened pieces of pine. These are laid in an imbricate manner, and kept in position by nailing or by heavy timbers laid upon them.

The floors, for there were usually two—an upper and a lower—were also constructed of these slabs, which were rendered smooth by means of the ax, or a draw-knife, and then laid on or loosely nailed to the sleepers. The attic above was finished in a similar manner, and reached by a rough ladder or stairway, and the source of light was a hole left between the slabs, or an opening made by sawing the boards away, and closed in a similar manner to the window in the lower room.

To the Brooks house there was no porch, and the frequent passing of the numerous members of so large a family, together with the continual disagreement of dogs, and chickens, and pigs, whose principal rendezvous the yard was, had well nigh worn away every sprig of grass, until the ground was as smooth and bare as a bald head.

In the corners of a straggling worm fence that partially surrounded the house, Jamestown weed, American vermifuge, and horehound flourished in abandoned profusion, defying with the characteris-

tic persistence of weeds the combined efforts of man, beasts, and birds to effect their destruction.

Negroes do not usually dig wells, but seem to prefer instead to build their habitations near a spring or branch, for the reader must have long since come to the conclusion that the negro's chief desire and principal aim in life is to get through his pilgrimage in this vale of tears with as little exercise of his physical, as well as mental, powers as possible. Despite this fact, however, if the old time negro was left alone ten minutes, and then inquiry made as to what he was doing, the chances are that the reply would be, "Nuttin'-jes' stud'in' seh; dat's all," which would lead the novice in negro lore to believe him an exceedingly studious, if not learned individual, for has he not arrived at his conclusions by personal observation and the candid confession of so interesting a character? Much of this, however, the observer has been vastly mistaken in, as thousands of beguiled, deluded, and prejudiced persons can testify.

In a corner of the fence stood a bee-gum, called so because it was a hollow trunk of a black gum, or sourwood-tree, that had been sawed off evenly, about three feet in length, and a board nailed on one end, and which contained bees that had been robbed of their store and brought home captive.

In other corners of the yard lay a decrepit "hyar" trap, the remains of broken and worn-out hoes, and a plow that still had a shining mould-board. This seemed a favorite repository for the simple farming implements after being used, and it would seem that all the energy possessed by the owners had been expended in bringing them thus far, for frequently they are left in the field, as if the owners were in league with the elements to enrich the implement maker.

A corner of the chimney was utilized as a hen-house, and was constructed of rough slabs, with a rougher door, and a hole at one side of the shed,

with a notched pole leading from the ground to it, which served as a ladder for the innumerable chickens, guineas, and turkeys to find ingress into their roosting-place. The remaining corner of the chimney served for varying purposes; the chief, however, being a resort where in the chilly days of autumn and winter, when the wintry blast blew furiously and roared about the humble cabin, the children, tired of being pent up in the narrow confines and semi-darkness of the house, would sneak away from the fire and run there to play, and to bask in the glorious and warming sunlight.

One child, prompted by the rest, would steal quietly up the ladder into the loft, quickly filch a handful of walnuts from the floor and carry them down to his companions, who eagerly awaited him. Then they would crack the "wunnuts" between two "rocks" and eat them after the fashion of squirrels. If the feast was added to by the rarer hickory nut, or still rarer "scaly barks," the children would dance with delight, and anticipate the joys of eating them with the fondness of a practised gastronomist. When the mother of the little thieves would notice the gradual dwindling of her winter's store, which she had had the utmost difficulty in collecting in their season, her suspicions would be aroused, since no good reason could exist for the frequent and stealthy visits to the loft, and she would confront the culprit, caught returning on another foray, with having taken them, to meet with the most unequivocal denial, "I 'clar' ter Gawd I nuver tetch'd 'em!" The child's mind was never able to reckon with the intricacies of circumstantial evidence, nor to in the least understand how the mother could judge from conclusions that certain suspicious rhythmical blows, followed by a cracking sound, and often confused by a heated argument of "dat's mine," "dat's mine," "tain' no sich thing; g'way," would lead her to a positive knowledge of the delinquents.

Another object that was at one time so constantly seen in the negro's yard as to pass unnoticed was the lye hopper, which is passing into desuetude owing to the cheapness of soap. One of these occupied a corner of the yard, and was the common receptacle for the woodashes. Water was poured upon them, it percolated through, and the resulting lye was used in soap making.

The "gyarden" which supplied the vegetables for family use was probably of half an acre in extent. Enclosed in a half-hearted way by the characteristic and picturesque rail-fence, a portion of which had rotted away, and another had been pushed down by a wandering cow, and part of the garden devastated.

The garden was planted and worked splendidly at first, and the virgin richness of the soil, added to yearly, would make a prolific yield; but the rapidly-increasing neglect of the owners after the novelty had worn off soon consigned it to utter ruin, for with the exception of occasional desultory hoeing, which seemed to stimulate the growth of weeds as much if not more than the vegetables, it was not worked at all. Hence the family's dependence usually was bread, meat, and chicken, with occasional peas, corn, onions, snaps, etc.

The furnishing of the ordinary negro cabin was so devoid of ostentation, of comforts, and of elegance, that one wondered at the content and apparent peace of mind of those who inhabited it. Of course there were no carpets. In one corner stood the already mentioned "cubbud," and close by a "chis," which could be locked, and was the one place of safety against the children to be found in the house. The bed was usually a cheap poplar affair, or one made at home of rough, unplanned wood, frequently with the bark still on, and had a few slabs to hold the "tick," generally of common domestic filled with wheat straw. No springs or headboard existed, and the few quilts were made by

quilting cotton between white cloth that had previously been dyed yellow with hickory bark; or else they were ragged masses of calico, of lurid hues, that had been cut in squares or diamond figures, with here and there the cotton filling becoming loose and falling into little wavelets, with sprays of cotton occasionally bursting through a hole in the calico. There possibly was a pillow or two, but of sheets we cannot answer. A few split-bottomed chairs, a pine table, tray, pan, bucket, churn, and cooking utensils in sparing number occupied their accustomed places, while an old army musket occupied two dogwood forks over the doorway.

Such is a description of a negro's home, and such was the home of Punch. To those who have never been within a negro cabin it would seem incredible that a family of twelve or fifteen could live happily within such narrow limits. Yet it is true. After this digression we return and we trust the reader will overlook this somewhat lengthy description of the negro cabin, which by some may not be thought necessary or desirable in a fictitious tale.

The home of Punch was built on a hill of considerable height overlooking the beautiful and placid Staunton River, in a county that shall be nameless, but somewhere between Ward's Neck and Moseley's Ferry, in Virginia.

Standing in the door of the cabin the observer beholds with delight the far-stretching fields of corn in the lowgrounds, green and luxuriant in the light of the fading day; and ripening fields of yellow oats, and of wheat that has been cut and shocked. The gentle south wind has risen, and begins to cool the over-heated earth, and is grateful to those who have toiled all day. The sun sets, and darkness falls rapidly like a black pall upon the earth. Wearied reapers and beasts return home, with tinkling trace chains, softened by the distance until they are musical. Lightning bugs begin their nightly carnival and are seen to flash here and there

their mysterious yellowish-green light. The katydids begin their nightly call, which, though discordant, is pacifying, and soothes the weary, in body and mind, to the sweet sleep of childhood.

Down in the cool dark woods behind the cabin one hears the plaintive cry of the whippoor-will repeated at regular intervals, with now and then an interjection of "whoo-o-o" from an owl.

The negro boys and young men are seen passing in a procession on their mules along the road in front of the house, with mysterious, greenish-black bundles in front of them. During a certain period of summer "rich weeds," which are nutritious, and grow in plenty in moist places, furnish abundant and cheap food for cattle. It is bundles of these that the passers-by bear before them.

Far down the road, in the misty uncertainty of the gathering twilight, can be indistinctly outlined the figure of a man seated sidewise on a mule. He sings in the peculiar monotone of the negro, but his voice is of a peculiar sweetness, tinctured perhaps with sadness, as he recites the beautiful ballad reminding us of the heart-breaking separations of those dreadful days long years ago:

"O my darlin' Nelly Grey,
Dey have taken yo' erway!
An' I nuver spec' ter see
Yo' eny mo'."

CHAPTER II.

THE NEGRO'S FRIEND.

Upon an adjacent hill from the home of John Brooks, and within sight of it when the leaves were off the trees, was the rambling old house that had been the home of the Morton family for a hundred years—built in those old days when comfort and hospitality were of more importance than architectural beauty, or at least seemed to be so considered by the owners.

The house was of two stories, built in rectangular shape, which, from being added to on several occasions when sons of the first owners brought home their brides, had become an irregular pile, for these additions to the parent dwelling had added nothing to its beauty. After several of the sons had departed—it is said to the West, to find their fortunes there—the house became badly worn and in need of repair, which the present owner had done after his manner of doing, which was not in accord with the carpenters whom he employed.

Flournoy Morton was a man whom his neighbors loved and the negroes treated as a master, and revered as a living benefactor. While the kindest of men, he had the characteristic of being exceedingly obstinate, and persisted with the most stubborn determination in having his own way. And so it was that when the carpenter employed to make the badly-needed repairs came, and thinking to better please his employer offered some suggestions, not only were they utterly ignored, but he was peremptorily ordered to do it after the precise manner directed—by the tone of which order he came to the

conclusion that it was altogether a waste of time to persist further, so he thought no more of the matter, and went to work.

So characteristic had this one trait become, that the negroes of the neighborhood called him "Contra'y Morton," but never in his presence, which they would have sooner done in the presence of Satan himself.

Once, at the close of a fruitful year on the river, the farm had yielded an excellent crop of corn. Not so on the highlands, however, for a long drouth in the proper season had lessened the crop, so that during the ensuing winter many of Flournoy Morton's neighbors came to buy corn of him, until his supply became almost exhausted, and fearing that he would not have enough to last through the year, he ceased to sell.

One bright, crisp morning in December—the snow had fallen lightly the night before and it was biting cold—a wornout single wagon, drawn by an old horse that seemed half fed and exhausted beyond endurance, stopped in front of the house. The driver slowly and painfully got down from his seat, and limped slowly through the gateway and up the walk to the front door. He knocked, and there came to the door Margaret, the wife of Flournoy.

"Why, good-mornin', Mrs. Morton."

"How do you do, Mr. Donaldson? Come in to the fire, and I will call Mr. Morton."

The visitor was shown into the sitting-room and Flournoy Morton told of his visit.

"Why, Donaldson, how-dye," said Flournoy upon entering the room, and extending his hand, which his visitor gingerly took, because he knew from experience how hard Flournoy squeezed when shaking hands, and let go with a wince of pain. As he seated himself he immediately made the object of his visit known by saying:

"Flournoy, I am in a tight place. The little corn I raised this year is gone a'ready, an' here 'tain'

Christmas an' I got to buy corn. Kin you lemme have two barrels?"

"I haven't got any corn to sell, Donaldson, for I have sold all I can spare."

"I know that, but you're more able to buy corn than me, and with ther roads as heavy as they is, I doubt ef I kin pull that much home, an' I know my ole myar' won't stan' the trip ter the depot."

Flournoy was thoughtful; he was thinking of the rapidly-ageing man in front of him, of the desperate wound that caused him to limp, and of his unfaltering bravery, for he had been a corporal in a company of which he had been lieutenant during the Great War. He was also thinking how hardly fortune had dealt with him, and more favorably with himself. He relented, and raised his head and abruptly asked:

"What's corn worth?"

"Three dollars."

"That's not what I've been gettin'."

"How much was that?"

"Two dollars."

"But the market price is three."

"Confound it, my price is two, and I mean two."

"But I'm willin' to pay three."

"But I am not."

"Why?"

"Because the corn is mine, and I will sell it at any price I choose."

"Very well. If you want to give your corn away, I can't help it."

"Drive around to the corn-house."

Mr. Donaldson prepared to go out after having paid for the corn, and drove to the corn-house, where Flournoy had preceded him.

The corn was soon measured and put on the wagon, and as the brave little corporal shook hands with his old lieutenant, he said to him as a tear stood in each eye:

"Flournoy, you would have your way if you went to the devil for it."

Flournoy smiled. It is needless to say that the old soldier would have refused a gift of the corn, and Flournoy knew it.

The family of Flournoy Morton consisted of his wife and a son of seven years, for they had married rather late, and to this son they were unusually devoted. Donald, for this was the boy's name, having no white children to associate with, naturally sought companionship somewhere, and found the most delightful society, to his boyish heart, in company with Punch. This devotion of each other was touching, and despite the persuasions of Donald's mother that he remain at home, where she laboriously endeavored to amuse him, she could plainly see the childish longing for a child's society, and would reluctantly kiss her boy and bid Punch, who had unbidden left home and come to play with Donald, to take good care of him, just as if it were not clearly a case of blind leading the blind.

Every white man who has been brought up where he had access to negro playmates remembers it as one of the delights of his life; and oftentimes in after years, whatever he may have become, remembers that at least at one time in his career he was a leader, for it seems natural that the white boy should be. Whether because the negro, even in childhood, acknowledges the supremacy of the white, by intuition; or whether by the superior knowledge possessed, or whether by that habit produced by enforced servility for centuries, it is not definitely known. But of this much we are certain, that Donald held such command over Punch, whether prompted by love, reverence, or fear, that the little negro at a word would have followed him even to a graveyard on a dark night.

While Punch showed so much loyalty to Donald, the latter, upon hearing even his name announced, would suddenly leave any occupation he was about,

and rush out of doors, or into the kitchen to join him; and if he happened to be at meals when that name was announced, his appetite would be suddenly lost, and seizing a potato, roll, or piece of cake he would hastily leave the table, deaf to the remonstrances of his parents, who never, it is to be regretted to say, were very strict in the discipline of the child. Upon joining Punch in the yard, the good things brought from the table were not only divided, but the whole given to the poorly-fed little fellow, to the untold delight of the solicitous mother, who was consoled by knowing that if her child was not the most obedient, he was not selfish. To Punch these occasional contributions to a stomach that was accustomed to having thrust into it everything from red clay to green apples and sour-grass, such delicacies were most welcome, since "wheat brade" was a dainty, and cake was ambrosia. Never in all his life had he gotten enough cake, but he could remember one or two Christmas Days when he had candy and cake in quantity sufficient for so small a boy, and then he promptly ate to the rebellion of his persecuted stomach, and in consequence was made sick; nevertheless, he would never acknowledge that he had had enough.

Not by any means did affairs between the two boys always go so smoothly, for there were petty quarrels that were soon made up, and each seemed to make the bond closer between the two.

The two differed widely. Punch was muscular, and his arms and legs were well rounded, and his chest was broad and deep for his growth; in fact, he was so precocious that he might have been taken for an older child. His strength and endurance even at this age was the wonder of his parents, and his athletic feats were the pride of Donald, who, like other feeble children, admired skill and strength in others, especially if unable to exert it themselves.

Don, for we shall henceforth call him as everybody else did, presumably because of particular care being paid to his health, was not strong. Exercise that would warm Punch until he tingled to his finger tips, would fatigue Don, for his chest was shallow, and he was pale, and not so rotund as healthy boys usually are. The games that he most delighted to play were those requiring little physical exertion.

So intimate was the relationship between the boys that they were practically inseparable during their waking hours. Many had been the times that search had been instituted for them, and when they were found both were together, sound asleep down in the woods, or some other unusual place. Donald had fallen asleep many a time on the bed in Punch's home, to the latter's infinite delight, who would entertain his guest so long as he possessed consciousness, or in fanning away the flies with a branch of locust until, overcome by sleep, which seems to be one of the banes of the race, he, too, would succumb to its influence.

Don when so found would be sharply reprimanded by his mother for doing such a thing. Many is the time he had gone to bed and sobbed himself to sleep because he was not permitted to spend the night with Punch, which he had so much wanted to do, nor could he in the least understand why he was allowed to play, eat, and sleep with his black companion during the day, but prohibited from doing so at night.

Punch was over at the Morton's one day, for whenever he could secure a respite from minding John or Sue, he rarely failed to go there in search of Don. They had been playing all over the house, and it having become dusk, both went to the room of Don, who even at this age occupied the adjoining room to his parents. Thoroughly fatigued, both children sat down, and the cosy bed seemed to conjure both to forego supper, and to sleep.

"Le's go ter bed, Punch."

"Waal."

"Yo' git behin'."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Mammy whup me."

"What fer."

"Ka'se she say yo' kin sleep in my baid, but I
cyarn' in yourn."

"Why?"

"Dunno."

"Yo' go ter baid, Don; I ain' sleepy."

Don, without further parley crawled in, dirty feet and all, and was soon sound asleep. Punch kept his vigil fully five minutes, then, stretching himself prone upon the floor, became oblivious to the fact that he had but so recently announced that he was not sleepy; nor was he conscious of such a lapse until Mary, his eldest sister, who was cook for Mrs. Morton, entering the room in search of Don, blundered headlong over the sleeping Punch, and gave a grunt of satisfaction at having found him. She scurried him through the dark hall to the dining-room without taking the trouble even to look at him, muttering to herself meanwhile something about "wunder whut mek dat Don keep gittin' los' sumwhar er nu'r'r." Arriving at the dining-room door with Punch by the hand, the father and mother looked up, expecting to see their child, and—beheld, Punch!

"Mary," called Mr. Morton sharply, "where did you get Punch?"

"Punch? Dis ain'—Gre't Gawd A'mighty!—dis ain' Don. Whar' yo' cum fum, boy? How yo' git in Don's room?" asked Mary in a breath, shaking him as if she had determined to disrobe him, in her endeavor to awaken him, for he had followed her while fast asleep, and stood blinking in the glaring light from the table, his expression most comical when he fully awakened to the fact that

he was in such a predicament. He said not a word, but hurried by the nearest doorway out of doors, and thence home as fast as his legs would carry him. Mr. Morton burst out laughing, and called to Mary, who was half way up the stairs by this time, to "bring Don, you wench. Don't you know the difference between black and white, you fool?" To which there came a meek reply of, "Yas, seh."

Don was soon brought in and seated at table. When his father had said grace, and closed with the Amen, he continued to say, just as if he had not finished the sentence: "If ever that little imp Punch goes in that room again I'll thrash him."

Don looked puzzled, as though his thoughts had been wool-gathering, or that he had been listening to a novel kind of grace; but with a look into his father's face it all recurred to him, and he burst out crying.

"Hush, Don, hush; father is not mad with you, he is speaking about Punch."

"I know it, I know it," sobbed Don. "It isn't his fault. Don't whip him, father, please don't; whip me, I did it; please, father, I did it."

"Did what? Did what?" kept repeating his father before he could make himself heard between the child's sobs and pleadings.

"I told him to go to bed with me," sobbed Don.

"Well, I'll be —" (it is not good for persons with tender consciences to hear the remainder of this sentence, and therefore it is suppressed) ejaculated his father, in astonishment. "And did the little black, impudent wretch do so?"

"No, sir," replied Don, apparently much relieved, as were both father and mother.

"Eat your supper, son; father won't whip him this time, but you must not sleep with black boys. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Father," said Don.

"What, my boy?"

"Why mustn't I sleep with Punch? He won't hurt me; and he keeps the flies away, and he loves me, and, and—"

"And what?" asked his father, wondering what other virtue Punch could possess that his son hesitated so long in making known.

"And he smells so good," ventured Don.

Here there was another ejaculation from Don's father that would appear exceedingly out of place in print, and which he supplemented by answering: "Because, because—you mustn't."

"Why?"

"Eat your supper, Don, and don't ask so many questions."

"Mother, do black children go to heaven?" asked Don.

"Yes, if they are good," replied she.

"And don't white children and black children sleep together there?"

"I don't know, Don."

"I reckon I can sleep with Punch in heaven, then, can't I, mother?"

"Maybe so, my boy." Finding it impossible to restrain her feelings longer, his mother got up from her seat and bent over the boy's head, and tears fell on his face as she kissed him and told him it was bedtime.

"What are you crying for, mother?"

"Nothing, son; I was only thinking."

"Well, mother, where did Polly's baby Ned come from? He is neither white like I am, nor black like Punch; and will he go to heaven, too?"

Polly was the laundress, and her yellow baby was a puzzle to Don.

This question was so much of a puzzle that Don's father laughed and his mother hid her blushes, and declared in her turn that he asked too many questions, entirely.

Punch readily found his way home, and without his absence being noticed. He had a piece of cold

bread and some milk for supper, and quickly sought his pallet upon the floor, where his rest was unbroken throughout the long, hot night.

For many years John had worked as a hand for Mr. Norton, who had given him the cabin free of rent—the same, by the way, which he now occupied.

This plan was pursued until Mr. Morton plainly saw his servant was dissatisfied. So one morning during the winter preceding the opening of this history, which was the disastrous year of '77, when the Staunton destroyed all the corn on the low-grounds, and came so very near ruining many farmers along its course, Mr. Morton, after finishing his breakfast, went out on the porch, and found John seated on the steps.

John politely took off his hat and accompanied the act by saying:

"Mornin', Marse Flo'noy."

"How goes it, John?"

"What in the thunder 'd you come around here calling me 'marster' for? Didn't I tell you never to say it again so long as your head had a nap on it?"

"Yas, seh."

"When you plagued negroes want something you come here and 'marster' me; at other times it's Mis' Flournoy, or, worse still, 'boss man' when you have work to do you don't like. What is it, John?" This in a more kindly tone.

"I jes' cum fer ter ax yo' sumin'. Waal, my fam'ly is gittin' bigger 'n bigger, 'n ev'ry year I wucks heah, when we cum ter settle up at de en' er de year, 'stid er yo' ownin' me sumin', I owes yo', an' dat's de way hit's bin uver since I bin heah."

"Well, you spend all you earn before your month 's up."

"I knows dat, but yo' see I cyarn' read, an' when I tek dem orders yo' gimme ter de sto', 'tain' lek de money. When dey see me er cumin' in, dey ain'

anx'us 'bout waitin' on me; but when I got de money dey jes' falls o' one 'nurr ter see which git ter me fus'. An' den when I gin 'em er order er yourn, dey say, 'Waal, John, whut kin we do fer yo'? An' ef I have de money dey says: 'Unc' John, whut kin we sell yo' dis mornin''. Nor, seh, I nuttin' 'bout dis scratchin' wid er pen on er white piece paper; dat ain' lek money. Den dem young gemmens in de sto' allers talkin' dey foolishness 'bout 'naught 's er naught, an' figger 's figger; all fer de white man, none fer de nigger.' Nor, seh, gimme de money ev'y time."

Rarely in all his life had John made such a lengthy speech, and in consequence he surprised his employer.

"Why didn't you tell me so before, John. I would have paid you in money long ago. It is only more convenient for me to pay you as I have done."

"Yas, seh, dat 's so."

"And is this what you wanted to speak with me about?"

"Yas, seh,—nor, seh,—dat is, I say ter myse'f, I better see Mis' Flo'noy, an' see 'bout whut I gwine do 'bout 'nu'rr year," answered John, blundering over every word he had to say like a schoolboy making a speech; for the speech concerning the relative quickening powers of money versus orders upon certain individuals was merely introductory and spoken, not so much because the speaker had a real complaint to make, but for something to say.

"Mis' Flo'noy," abruptly began John, without waiting for his employer to speak, "whut yo' gwine do wid dat strip er lan' 'twix my house an' de big road, down nex' de branch? 'Tain' no 'count ter yo' an' nobody else much. Won' yo' lemme have hit, please, seh?"

"What are you going to do with that piece of land, John? Don't you know I never could raise

anything on it, and I doubt if it would sprout peas?"

"Yas, seh, but den I b'lieve ef yo' would have mercy on er po' nigger an' sell him dat strip er lan,' wid de house, he nuver fergit yo' es long es he live, an' he wud mek out ter scratch 'long somehow er 'nur'r."

"So you won't back out if I agree to sell you one of the worst corners of my farm?"

"Nor, seh; nor, seh."

"Well, I will sell you that much land, and the house, for a hundred dollars. Now, where are you going to get a hundred dollars from?"

"You nummin', I gwine git hit, Marse Flo'noy—I ax yo' pardon—Mis' Flo'noy."

"When you get it, John, let me know, and I will have the deed made and signed."

"Yas, seh, dat I will, dat I will."

"Now tell me why you want to buy a home there, of all places?" asked Mr. Norton. "Don't you know that you have a large family, and you can't hope to make a living for your wife and children on that place?"

"I knows dat, Mis' Flo'noy: but den all un' 'em 'cept de ole "ooman an' de li'lest chillun is findin' deyselves, an' den I kin 'ten' sum er yo' lan' fer part de crop, ef yo' lemme."

"I don't want to lose you as a hand, John; but if you had rather go to yourself, why you had best do so. As for working on shares, I am also willing to do that; but tell me why you had rather live here than on the negro settlement down in the Barnesville neighborhood, where even for a hundred dollars you could get more land and probably just as good a house as the one I offer."

"I knows dat de truf, but dat lan'!—dat lan', it so po' dat dey have ter pull de fence down fer ter let de kildees thoo'. An' den de folks down dar is so low-lif'ed dey ain' got no heart fer a nigger---I mean de white folks ain', an' de niggers jes' es

common es dish-water. Nor, seh, when I g'way fum heah yo' got drive me wid er frail fus'; 'ka'se I knows whar ter git a dus' er meal an' er poun' er meat when I ain' got none, an' dat is right dar in dat smokehouse. Nor, seh, I ain' gwine—nary step."

"Ah, now I understand very well why you want to live here. You think I am going to take care of you. But, John, you know me well enough to know that I will not have anything to do with you unless you work, and work hard. I know what you can do, and if you are willing to work for shares, I will furnish the team, and you the labor, and go halves in the crop."

"Dat's de tater!" By which the negro meant the bargain was satisfactory, and without another word except, "Yo' jes' hol' on, Mis' Flo'noy," he went home, to return in a few minutes with an old greasy shot bag, which seemed rather heavy. Mr. Morton saw him approach with some curiosity, and when he arrived at the porch he was there to meet him.

"What did you come back for, John?"

"Dar 'tis, Marse—Mis' Flo'noy."

"There's what?" asked Mr. Morton, at the same time kicking the bag as it lay on the porch floor. The kick produced a sonorous clink.

"Dat hundud dollars."

"Nigger, where did you get a hundred dollars?" inquired Mr. Morton as he took up the bag and undid the string that closed the mouth. "Steal it?" inquiringly. "No, you haven't got sense enough," thought his questioner.

"Nor, seh, dat I didn't," with a proud grin, as if such acquirement had been an achievement worthy of approval. "My ole 'ooman's ole hens lay dat; dat is, dey laid de aiggs, an' sot on 'em, an' she sol' bofe un 'em an' hide de money in de house."

"Is this all you have?"

"Yas, seh; ev'y lars' cent."

Mr. Morton took the bag under his arm and

walked over to his office in the corner of the yard, bidding the negro follow him. He entered, and began counting the pile of silver, gold, nickel, and copper coins which he had emptied from the bag on his desk, or secretary. After busily counting for some time, he told John that there was one hundred and six dollars and seventy-six cents in the bag.

"Here is one hundred dollars in this pile, and that is yours," and he pushed the remainder toward John.

The negro replaced the money in the shot bag, and stood respectfully waiting, while Mr. Morton drew a sheet of paper from his desk and began writing. He was writing the deed for the land, which he so accurately described that a surveyor's services were unnecessary. As he signed and folded the instrument, he picked up a gold double eagle, the only one in the pile, and gave both to the negro, who stood with wide-open mouth and eyes, speechless in his fruitless endeavor to find words to thank Mr. Morton.

"Take it, you fool. Now go over to the house and get Miss Margaret to sign it."

The negro, in his attempt to make a profound bow of thanks, made an elaborate failure; for in stepping backward he came very near falling over a chair. His tongue, however, found its office, and instead of making the bow, as he had intended doing, he compromised with:

"Thankee, Marse Flo'noy; thankee, seh." Quickly seeing his lapse into the use of forbidden title, he recovered sufficiently to say: "Gret' Gawd, I 'clar' I fergit dat time, I sho' did." At which semblance of apology the kindly Mr. Morton could scarce refrain from smiling.

In a few moments John returned with the deed signed by Mrs. Morton, and was instructed by Mr. Morton how he must have it recorded; but he

begged Mr. Morton to attend to for him, which he willingly agreed to do.

Who can imagine the pride and happiness of the negro who left the little office conscious of the fact that he was a landholder for the first time in his life?

CHAPTER III.

THE CORNSHUCKING.

The boy who grows up to manhood without spending that portion of his life between childhood and youth in the country, knows little of the joys of such a life; except he possess the affluence to live both in city and country. Even if he does this, the country does not possess that freedom for him that it does for the country boy, who knows no restraint except obedience to his parents and to God. When the boy from the city departs for his summer outing in the country, he thinks it necessary to take along with him a quantity of useless machinery in the way of games, extra clothing, guns, etc., for unless he does so, however will he amuse himself?

The country boy thinks very little about it, apparently, for if he hasn't the fish hook, or line, or gun, or wagon, or any other of the numberless objects that are so useful in keeping boys out of mischief,—and we may add also, with regret, of getting them into it,—he makes them, or does without.

The country boy can afford himself more genuine healthy, hearty and lasting amusement with less to amuse himself than any member of the human race with which we are acquainted.

A child never derives the same pleasure from a toy that is bought as from one that is home-made, for the latter he watches, with eagerness, the gradual formation of; it is immediately beneath his constant observation, and he delights in its growth. An uncle, grandparent, or father usually becomes the toy-maker of the household, and if he be dexter-

ous, his time is well occupied while at home in making with his knife, or a few tools, many toys that are a constant source of pleasure to children. While the soft wood is being shaped into these objects, the children gather around the maker and wait in joyful anticipation for the finished toy which they greet with various upheavals of approval. Might not this have a tendency to make all of us who love approbation, quit our present occupation and become toy-makers?

The summer exhausts itself at last, but not before it has well-nigh sapped the vitality of every living thing. The road in front of Punch's home is as deep in dust as it is deep in mud in winter; and the grass and weeds along the roadside are powdered with the impalpable dust that is wafted there by the winds. It has not rained for weeks, and the hands in the field are busily engaged in pulling fodder, or cutting tops, or in the tobacco ground worming and suckering tobacco. Some of the latter is being cut, and as the cutter walks along the regular verdant rows of broad-leaved weeds, now and then pinching the leaves to tell if it is ripe for cutting, or selecting plants simply by looking at them, and with his gleaming knife in a twinkling slits down and truncates the stalk before one has time to comprehend his movements, then lets the plant fall like a stricken foe, or sets it astride a stick that it held by a boy. The workers while away the hot, weary evening in chanting some hymn or psalm, for negroes do not generally resort to ribald or popular songs, except upon occasions of revelry of some sort. Nor would the negroes of the community which we describe tolerate the fiddle or violin. A jews-harp, or a banjo, were permissible, but the fiddle was the instrument of the devil, and superstition was so rampant concerning it that few negroes would dare touch, much less attempt to play, an instrument forbidden by the church in the plainest language. There were, of

course, those hopelessly lost individuals, in the opinion of the faithful, who held fast to the fond folly of their teachers, who played at "white folks" parties, and in many instances played well.

Punch, one day in his usual restless mood, had gone down to the "barker" ground along with his sister Sue, and Don, and the three were having a delightful time of it racing up and down between the rows of tobacco plants, succeeding wonderfully well in breaking a number of leaves off before they were told to behave themselves by John, who looked up from his work long enough to see the harm they had done, made a peculiar noise, denoting impatience, by drawing the air successively through his teeth, and lapsed into silence again.

The children had in the meantime captured an enormous tobacco worm, and Punch was teasing his sister by throwing it at her, and, tired of this, they had seated themselves and were preparing to torture the worm to death, which torture was to be so frightful in its ingenuity that it would have been very much better had the worm never seen the light of day.

Suddenly, and without warning, there was a heart-rending shriek from Sue, who hitherto had been unusually quiet, and her two surprised companions, looking up, saw her running as fast as she could, breaking off tobacco leaves, and repeatedly falling down in her flight to scramble to her feet and renew the pace more madly still. Looking about for the cause of such a stampede on the child's part, they beheld Mr. Morton standing above them, fairly convulsed with laughter at the fleeing child's discomfiture. The little girl was no more afraid of any ravenous beast than of Mr. Morton when he came upon her suddenly with his eyelids turned back, so that the red lining would show. The result was hideous, and it was one of his failings that he could not forbear scaring the child when the opportunity presented itself. Don arose from the ground,

and went to his father. Punch, meanwhile, walked a short distance with his head hanging down, as if guilty of some wrong doing, then quickly changed his walk into a run, until he had caught up with his sister, who was trembling with fright, and together they wandered home.

Gradually the delightful days became shorter, the nights temper the heat of the cloudless days, and presently the leaves become yellow, and then, like a fading sunset, run the whole scale of color.

The sorrowing of the whippoorwill is rarely heard, and in his stead is heard the plaintive call of the partridge away down in the distance. Here and there one sees a puff of blue smoke, and hears the boom of a gun. There is a gentle haze that produces the constant effect upon one of feeling as though he had just awakened from sleep, and there is a pervasive silence about everything that is significant. Significant that the work of exhausted Nature is ended, and with it she enters upon that long period of rest which ends in the spring.

The first killing frost has pinched the cheeks of the apples in the orchard until they are red, and the seared leaves, after passing through the most gorgeous gradations of color, fall in hosts and are wafted hither and thither, just as the gusts of Fortune treat those unlucky individuals called men and women.

The laborers having housed that troublesome crop, tobacco, now turn their attention to the corn. Away off there in the grayish green field can be seen the struggling mules pulling the heavy wagon loaded to the top, and even falling over the "side-boards" with the rich and ripe-looking ears, which are large enough to knock a man down with. The laden wagon slowly pulling into the open road, after being frequently brought to a standstill by one or both of the mules so far forgetting themselves as to pause within reach of a juicy ear of corn, when he would be reminded of his mundane

duties by a blow from an ear of corn thrown by his driver, accompanied by an imprecation varying in intensity according to the perversity or leniency of his master.

Another empty wagon comes into place, the driver jumping down from the cavernous wagon body, or from his saddle mule, and aided by the "pullers" the body is rapidly loaded, and groaning under its load it, too, departs.

The day's work over, the tired, muddy, tattered and cockle-burred pullers roll in on top of the last load of corn, each accompanied by a big yellow pumpkin, which will be boiled, and then fried for supper. Tired, did we say; but oh, so happy are these simple laborers!

The corn is hauled into the corn-house yard, and thrown into an enormous pile, where it becomes a tantalizing but forbidden meal to the stock. The animals seem to appreciate man's effort in bringing the food to them, but seem at a loss to understand why, after putting himself to so much trouble on their account, he stoutly prohibits any depredations upon it. It is usually the duty of the children about the house to mind the corn pile and to prevent inroads upon it, and so frequent are the attendant scoldings, and sometimes worse, that they are heartily glad when the corn is all hauled and the shucking begins.

For a week or more, perhaps, the driver John had been asked at every load if "that 's the last" by the anxious children. "And when will the shuckin' begin?" "'Bout de middle er nex' Juven-
ber," replied John without a smile, but with a countenance beaming with satisfaction at having so entirely befuddled the young minds, that he chuckled with delight at even this brief respite from the innumerable questions.

Don was the chief questioner, for not only did he want to know about the time that corn-shucking would commence, but the day it would cease; the

number of ears of corn in the pile, and so on; and even asked poor John if he was of opinion that the sack of corn that Joseph sold his brother Benjamin, and had his silver cup and money placed therein, was the same kind that he was unloading. This was most too far a venture for John, so he promptly replied:

“I dunno, son, I spec’ so.”

The name of the peculiar month as given by John confounded Don for a while, but after thinking he essayed to know when Juvember came.

“There’s January, February, March, April, May, June, July, September, October, November, and December. That’s ‘leven,” as he announced the number counted on his fingers. “How many mont’s in er year, Unc’ John?”

“Dey say dar’s twelve?”

“An’ I counted ‘leven.”

“Yo’ jes’ lef’ out Juvember, dat’s hit.”

“That’s so,” said Don. “When is that, Unc’ John?”

“Oh, dat’s nex’ mont’.”

Here the jubilant boy fairly danced with delight, and left off without asking any more questions, to scramble over the pile of crisp, dry corn in search of a green ear that was suitable for roasting. Presently he found one soft and juicy, and manages to strip off the shucks, but when he comes to breaking the husk from the shuck his strength fails him, and he runs to John to do it for him; which the patient John, stopping short in his work, does. Thence the boy, followed by Punch, goes straight to the kitchen, where Mary is preparing dinner, and is in no fit mood to be interrupted.

“Aw, Mary, roas’ this ear for me an’ Punch.”

“G’way fum heah, boy; you’ reckon I ain’ got nuttin’ ter do but fool wid yo’? I got de white folks’ dinner ter git.”

“Please, Mary, an’ I ’ill give you some.”

Mary’s mind changes at this prospect, and tak-

ing the ear with a quick, impatient movement, which closely resembles a jerk, says:

"Waal, gimme hit heah, den; but don' cum 'roun' boderin' me no mo'."

The ear is laid upon the clean hearth, from which the ashes have been scraped, and covered with hot embers, and in a little while it is removed nicely browned, and the delicious odor tempts the boys so far that they burn themselves in attempting to eat it.

Mary breaks the ear in half, takes a mouthful of toll from each piece, and gives them to Don, who divides with Punch. The ear is rapidly consumed to the last grain as they seat themselves in the kitchen doorway, and the appetite of Don being whetted by the corn, he begins teasing Mary for a biscuit, which she gives him, and the two depart satisfied.

Negro cooks are tyrannical, and if the unbeliever doubts the truth of this, let him on a hot summer day attempt to enter her domain, the kitchen; and he will soon find out that whoever he be, if he so much as dares to give an order or direction without well-constituted authority, he will meet with such a rebuff as to forever after still his desire to be their guide and director.

The last load of corn is brought up from the low-grounds finally, where for a week or two the boys about the farm have been sent to mind the cows, and to keep them in that part of the field where corn has been gathered.

This is what they were supposed to do, but what they really did was this: Before the sun has risen on a frosty morning in October it is biting cold, and the forlorn and barefoot boys are sent off with the cows to the lowgrounds, where they can browse on the remains of the ravaged cornfield. They drive the cows along the road, where tempting morsels of corn greet them at every turn, coupled with the invigorating air, which apparently as

much disturbs the cows' equanimity as it depresses the boys, who had very much rather, every mother's son of them, have remained in their beds an hour or two longer.

Presently a miscreant cow bolts right through the corn, selecting with masterly foresight a most impregnable barrier of blackberry and dewberry briars, which literally cover the ground, and bristle with the ferocity of an animal. The boy nearest the vagrant sets his teeth, looks about for a stone or two, or even fills his pockets, then turns upon the cow, which has stopped after reaching an ear of corn, and is apparently endeavoring to swallow it whole. He flings a "rock," as he would call it, with such certain aim that the cow slowly closes her eyes with pain as it strikes her on the head, and dropping the corn flies in a gallop deeper into the field. The boy hesitates a moment in his assault upon the frost-covered briars, and then makes a plunge, has his feet badly scratched and torn, but heads off the cow and brings her back to the road again with the admonition, "Ef yo' uver do dat ag'in I gwine tek a rock an' 'buss' yo' black haid op'n!"

Reaching the place of pasturage, the boys seek a sheltered place by the river bank, and proceed to make a fire of driftwood, which is lighted by a "chunk of fire" brought all the way from the house. Then the delightful part of cow-minding presents itself, as the fire blazes up and they warm themselves in comfort, nurse their torn feet, and are on the eve of parching some corn in the hot ashes, when lo! one of the boys cries out, "Hi, whar's de cows?" Suddenly all are alert, because the hands are in the field by now, and if the cows get away from them, and it is found out, they will be whipped. So off they go, find the cows in the corn, but, luckily perhaps, undiscovered, which they are of great pains to keep so, at any rate. They bring off the remains of the half-eaten ears, and devour

them instead. How quickly do we learn to smooth over our faults, and to deceive others.

The negro, unless going upon a journey, rarely eats an early breakfast, preferring, much to the astonishment of those who never do any work on an empty stomach, to go to work first. When the breakfast is served, it may be in the field, or at home. If at home, it is the counterpart of dinner. If in the field, the laborer stops his plow, or drops his hoe, and going to the nearest spring he seats himself in the shade, takes the basket from the child that brings it, or very frequently the knotted bandanna handkerchief containing the bread and meat, and here, al fresco, he eats his food and drinks his milk or sweetened coffee, or if this cannot be had, he drinks sweetened water, made so by molasses.

As the tired and hungry man regales himself upon his frugal meal, seated there by the spring, and as he occasionally heaves a sigh of satisfaction, and then stretches himself in the cool shade on the grass for a few moments' rest, anybody would have cause to envy him his lot.

The time for cornshucking has arrived at last on the Morton farm, and the children look forward with unutterable delight to the promised "cornshucking" which is to occur in a day or two.

The hands on the farm begin shucking in the morning before the children are up, and when they make their appearance each shucker has a fluffy pile of shucks at his back that almost hides him from view, and the pile of pearly-white corn is gradually growing under the corn-house door, dotted here and there with a crimson red ear.

The children are so eager in their desire to help that they are constantly getting in the way. They get the corn mixed with the shucks, and are thrown headlong (good-naturedly, of course,) into the shucks as punishment, from which they emerge with mouths full of corn silk, and grinning with

pleasure. Then one of the shuckers, having excavated the pile until a precipice of corn is above, calls the boys to go up on the pile and make it fall down. Here they go scampering up until they come to the very brink of the miniature precipice, and their superadded weight brings down an avalanche of corn about their ears, much to their satisfaction.

The day for, or more properly speaking the night for, the "corn-shucking" has arrived, and everything about the house is in confusion. Word has gone forth to the negroes of the neighborhood, and nightfall sees groups of jovial, happy men, women, and children seated about the great pile of corn. Seats are hard to find, the chairs in the house have been long since exhausted, then the benches from John's house have been sent for, and finally boxes, etc., have been utilized as seats.

The shucking now has commenced in earnest, and the rapid fall of ears about the corn-house door, where they strike with the force and rapidity of shots from guns, make the danger of attempting to enter the door during this time most apparent. The full moon in all her beauty is rising, and her silvery light serves the workers well. The air is cool, but not cold, and nobody suffers discomfort. Before the spirits of the shuckers even give evidence that good cheer is wanting, a jug of whiskey is brought by one of the hands, and as he bears the jug into view a general acclamation greets him, and each has something characteristic to say.

"Dat 's my gal, yass she is; put her right dar by my side an' I gwin'er sho' yer a hole in dis pile," says a big, black negro, who is noted in the neighborhood for doing nothing in particular, but is always "gwin'er." Another whistles for the jug; another calls it as if it were an animate thing. It is passed around the whole circle, and men, women, and children drink directly from the vessel, and some are apparently loth to let it go, while few forego its enlivening effect.

The change wrought in the erstwhile quiescent crowd by the innocent jug is truly remarkable. Laughter becomes incessant, and frequently breaks over the crowd like a billow. A deep bass voice begins to sing one of those old familiar hymns, "How Firm a Foundation," the singer lining off each verse before singing. Singers join in, each following the part that best suits his voice. The basses are deep, resonant and mellow; and the soprano, what shall we say of the soprano? It is beautiful. The untutored voice of the negro, before any attempt has been made by him to imitate the white man, possesses that weird, strange, soul-touching, and dulcet beauty in its native simplicity that recalls the perfume of wild flowers. The tenor is clear, far-reaching, and stirring, while the contralto recalls the soughing of the pines, it is so soft. If any singer present had been asked what part he or she was singing, it is doubtful if any one of them would have known what was meant. As the exhilarating effect of the whiskey manifests itself, the singers break through the usual bounds of propriety, and set off into the rattling, rollicking song:

"O, dear doctor, can you tell
What will make my sweetheart well?
A bottle of rum, and a pinch of snuff,
That will make her well enough."

Or as near like this as the negro dialect will permit. After this song, another and another rings out on the still night air. After a while there comes a lull in the singing, and then it ceases, except the hum of voices in merry tones.

Listening closely, we hear Melchizedek say to Patience, a saucy-looking mulatto girl seated by his side, nearer toward whom he has been slowly moving his stool ever since she came to occupy the adjoining seat:

"Patience, les' race. I bet yo' de bes' caliker cote in de sto' 'g'inst er kiss dat I gits de fus' red year

b'fo' yo'; an' ef I gits er year wid blue granes, I gwine kiss yo' es many times as dars granes. Whut yo' say, Patience? Say yass."

"G'way, 'Chiz'dek, dat ain' fyar; blue grane 's too common. I gwine race yo' fer a poun' er candy an' ginger cakes. I cyarn' eat no caliker, an' I ain' gwine fool wid no blue granes. I ain'. De red year fer dis gal; yass, Lawd. I ain' no blue-grane nigger. Yo' heah dat, don' yo'."

Melchizedek became conciliatory, and readily agreed to the stipulated forfeit.

The race begins between the two. "One, two, three," counts somebody, and they pounce upon the corn furiously, and the others almost cease shucking to watch the race. The brawny young man strips off the shucks with apparently no effort, his "shucking peg" fairly sings through the resisting brown covering, the ears follow so fast upon one another that two are in the air at the same moment, and they strike the corn-house door in a fusillade.

Not so the girl. Often she comes to an ear that is harder to strip than the rest, and in her eager haste she throws it down, or tries to break it over her knee. Faster, faster, and still faster do the ears of corn fly. The others cease work altogether to watch the result so eager does the contest become.

"She gwine ter beat yo', 'Chiz'dek; yo' ain' gwine kiss no gal, whyn't yo' shuck co'n, nigger?"

"Gwine ter let er gal beat yo??" calls a veteran shucker.

"She ain' trying' ter beat 'Chiz'dek. Don' yo all see she jes' prodjikin'. She ain' arter no candy nurr ginger cakes needer," says another.

A blush suffuses Patience's face, but it is hidden by the color of her skin, or the faint light; but a smile of pleasure wreathes her handsome face, and displays her splendid teeth, and her ringing laugh is like rippling water. She says nothing, but bends over, apparently to hide her blushes, and if possible, shucks faster than ever.

Melchizedek, already worked to a fever heat, throws off his hat, then his coat, and we are fearful lest he continue his disrobing to even a further degree. The sweat streams down his face, and he is heard to murmur audibly, "dem red years sho' is hard ter fin' dis night."

Suddenly there tumbles from the top of the pile an ear that is so characteristically tinged, even in the shuck, that both the contestants espy it, even in the dim light, reach for it, and grasp it at the same moment, each exclaiming: "Dat's mine, dat's mine; I seed hit fus'!" The shuck is partly torn in the struggle, and the gleaming crimson of the ear is exposed; each again cry, "I beat, I beat!"

"But 'tain' shucked yit," calls out a self-constituted umpire who watches the struggle, for it has become such now; and Patience, tripping over her stool, lets go the ear to catch herself from falling, but losing her balance falls softly into the shucks. The victor strips off the shuck in a twinkling, feigns to trip on his stool too, and gracefully follows Patience, who is hidden beneath the shucks. He quickly finds her, there is a loud and significant sound emanating from the pile; nay, two or more, and a not too demonstrative expostulation of, "Quit dat, 'Chiz'dek, dat ain' fyar; 'twarn't but one," with a slap on the cheek from the oppressed.

The forfeit paid, and the loser evincing her utter acquiescence to her fate by saying unguardedly, "I didn't wan' no candy, nohow," a portly matron, who knew more of the wiles of young women than they were conscious of themselves, replied with a broad grin and a knowing shake of the head, "I know'd dat all de time, honey," to which Patience said not a word in reply, but blushed guiltily instead.

After this temporary cessation from attack upon the corn-pile the crowd sets to with unusual zest, and when the jug is again and again passed, cheer becomes hilarity, which is succeeded by reckless

good humor; then corn is thrown often to any of the four points of the compass, and a few even become oblivious of their surroundings and fall fast asleep in the soft, downy shucks.

Gradually the pile dwindle, and as it does the younger children, and some of the grown people, make some excuse and depart to the kitchen, where a cheerful fire is burning, and where a bountiful supper is being prepared by Mrs. Morton and Mary, assisted by several volunteers from without. Suddenly from without is heard a roar of mingled voices, then somebody cries, "Hurrah for Mis' Morton!" and cheer after cheer greets that name that everybody loves so well.

"Whar' he? I seed 'im er li'l' while ergo," said some one. "Dar he, dar he," shout several in chorus, as he is seen coming out of the house.

The shucking is finished, and the men stealthily approach Mr. Morton, who attempts to make his escape by flying behind the house. They have him now, and he is surrounded, gently but firmly he is raised from the ground until he is seated on the broad shoulders of two black giants. In vain he entreats to be put down, but he finds that they move off with him. Entreaty gives place to threats that not one present in the least believes him capable of carrying out, and consequently no attention is paid to them.

"Put me down, Joe, you and 'Chizedek. What the devil do you think I want to ride about on your black backs for? Put me down, I say."

"Dat 's all right, Mis' Morton, we jes prodjikin'?" says Joe.

"Blame your 'prodjikin'."

"We all ain' gwine fur," says Joe, and they start off, everybody singing. Any one voice would have sufficed to have prevented Mr. Morton's voice from being heard, but he ineffectually argued against being made such a fool of, as he termed it, and repeatedly threatened that not a soul should have a

mouthful of supper. Seeing, however, that his voice was not equal to the overwhelming ones of the singers, he soon resigned himself to being carried twice or thrice about the corn-pile, and when he was placed upon the ground his good humor had returned, and he told everybody to go in the kitchen and get something to eat.

There is a lively race as to who shall enter the kitchen first, and the contestants fall over each other in their attempt to be first, when the clamor is mysteriously stilled in an instant by Mary, who in kindling wrath appears at the door and rebukes them with: "Whut marter 'long yo' niggers cumin' in de white folks house dataway? Whar' yo' manners, huh?" They slink away, without a word, to places in the kitchen, and supper is served.

There is a roast shoat, turkey, chicken, wheat bread, stewed pumpkin, cake, pies of various kinds, and persimmon beer. Each person present receives what he wants most, directly into his hand, and drinks his beer from a tin cup or mug. The feasting over, each departs to his home, happy and at peace with the world.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEGRO'S CHRISTMAS.

The holiday of all the year means to the negro far more than to the white man, and at no time during the twelve-month is he more happy than just before Christmas. For weeks in advance he begins preparation for the festivity which is always his, for the employer who gives a short holiday is rarely capable of securing the best hands. The best turkeys are cooped and fed with care, and the hog, or shoat, as they prefer calling him, is deprived of his liberty, cooped also in a rail pen, and fed to satiety until he becomes so fat that he is scarcely capable of standing.

The elder children at the first appearance of frost have dragged forth the dilapidated "hyar" traps from the fence corners, baited them with onion, and have succeeded wonderfully well in entrapping a number of "hyars," as the abundant skins in the loft will bear evidence of. These are bartered at the store for whatever the youthful owner most desires, which does not materially vary in any instance, particularly at this time of year, from candy, cake and pop crackers. The boy who is more skillful in trapping the hares than the rest is the subject of envy by all the others, for he carries the greatest number of pelts to the store, and is correspondingly rich in their eyes. He assumes the position of leader, and the younger children obey his mandates with fear and trembling.

Here is an instance: A boy ten or twelve years old enters a country store, where everything is

bought, from new beef to feathers, and also a great variety of goods sold. The boy apparently loses his voice as well as his wits immediately upon entering the store. He perhaps carries a dozen or so of dried rabbit skins tied in a bunch, each one standing out like a skirt, kept so by a forked stick. He is dazzled by the glitter of the new tin buckets, the array of boots, horse collars, and other useful, rather than ornamental, furniture pendant from the ceiling, where they look like strange fruit borne on a stranger tree. Presently a clerk approaches him and asks:

“What do you want, boy?”

“Tek hyar skins?”

“Yes, where are they?”

“Heah dey,” at the same time throwing the bunch upon the counter.

They are quickly counted, and the clerk asks:

“What you want for 'em? There are fifteen, and they come to fifteen cents.”

“How much yo' ax' fer dat pyar boots?” asks the boy, pointing to a rough pair of leather boots.

“Two dollars.”

“How much dat lef' den?”

“You blockhead, there will be nothing left. Two dollars is more than fifteen cents.”

“Dat so? Gimme sum candy, den.”

“How much?”

“Bout er poun'.”

“Fifteen cents won't buy a pound of candy.”

“Twon', waal, jes' gimme ten cents' wuf er candy, den, an' t'other in cakes.”

The articles are given him wrapped in brown straw paper, and he commences to lounge about the store. After having eaten all his candy and cakes, he saunters lazily out of the store, and home. If he had bought pop-crackers instead, which was often done, they would have been saved from day to day; but the gratifying sound of the exploding squib would long before Christmas Day had come have

caused a few to be fired daily until all had disappeared.

Long before this the crops had all been gathered in, and John Brooks had made his settlement for the year with Mr. Morton the day previous to the opening of this chapter.

To-day he arises before daylight, and with some rich lightwood kindled a blazing fire, and went out to feed his mule. Scarcely had he gone before Polly awakened Punch and told him that his father intended taking him to Cloverdale with him. He was awake in an instant, his face beaming with joy, and so eager was he to be off that he could not be still.

"When is us gwine, mammy?"

"Arter sun up."

"An' I gwine wid him,—wid daddy,—sho' 'nuff?"

"Yass, chile, dat yo' is. An' whut yo' gwine ter buy fer yo' ole mammy, son?"

"I gwine ter buy ev'ything in de sto'."

This touching evidence of the child's love for his mother aroused her maternal affection so far that she took him in her arms and kissed him, one of the few times that such a thing happened in the whole period of his career.

"Git down den an' lemme git breakfus' r'ady 'g'inst daddy cum back."

John soon returned from the stable, and let in at the door after him a draught of delightful morning air. Breakfast was dispatched quickly, and John, calling upon his wife to help fill the bags with corn, they went out to the crude corn-house, where several bushels of corn were measured and poured into the bags, they being tied and lifted into the single wagon, much to the admiration of Punch, who gloried in the strength of his father as he watched him lift the sacks upon his shoulders and deposit them in the wagon. Many times had he seen this done before, and more than once he had attempted to imitate the feat.

Just as the sun was rising, and the first beams kindled the hill tops into a glow, the two got into the wagon and John drove slowly off, the wheels clucking with a snapping sound under the load. The ground and fences were covered white with frost, and the air was calm, but very cold. John had wrapped Punch up in an old army overcoat, which was so large that it completely swallowed up the small boy, so that he scarcely felt the cold at all. His hat was so old that nobody could tell who the first owner was; but he had legitimately fallen heir to it as successor to his next elder brother, who relinquished the ownership when it no longer fitted him.

To the little benighted negro, who for the first time in all his life was on his way to the depot, about which he had heard ever since his mind became retentive enough to recollect the word, the day's journey would be indelibly stamped on his memory.

The child's elation was most touching, and as he rode along, tears trickled down his cheeks softly, and fell unobserved by his father. Whether the cold air produced this effect, or some psychical influence, we are not at liberty to state.

Never in his brief life had he dreamed of being so happy. To him the sun was brighter, and the beams danced in unison with his quickened heart. The air seemed more buoyant and the twitter of the birds was music, when before they were scarcely thought of. As he journeyed that splendid winter morning to the place which in after life was destined to be one of horror, he had no presentiment to that effect, so his joy was unmarred.

“Daddy?”

“Whut, son?”

“How much furder we got ter go 'fo' we git dar?”
This he asked after going two or three miles.

“Tain' much furder.”

“Whut I gwine see when I git dar?”

“Yo' gwine see a gre't long bridge 'cross de river,

an' den yo' gwine see er whole heap er houses, an' de railroad, an' de cyars, an' de sto' jes chockfull o' purty bran-new things, an' den yo' gwine ter see I dunno how many folks gwine back an' for'ards 'ten'in ter dey biz'ness."

"An' den how we gwine git clo's an' shoes an' things?"

"We gwine sell de co'n an' git 'em."

Here the child lapsed into silence, and who can tell of the varied images of wondrous things that were conjured up by his youthful mind. After being repeatedly asked by the child how much further they had to go during the ten miles' journey, the father awakened the sleeping child (who had become discouraged, and fallen into that blissful state) just as they entered the long bridge.

Punch started up in open-mouthed wonder, and gazed in astonishment at the varied number of novel sights about him. There was the fearful shriek of a locomotive away down the track, and the regular puffing sound, scared the boy so badly that he tried to hide in his father's arms. When the engine loomed into view his fright became a panic, and his father had to restrain him to prevent his jumping from the vehicle. He was trembling from head to foot, but though of an ashy paleness he did not cry, and upon being reassured by his father he resumed his seat on the corn bags. He continued to tremble, however, until the store was reached, where John, benumbed by the cold, awkwardly descended to the ground, and reached for Punch, who now shed his enormous covering like a chrysalis, and emerged, not by any means so splendidly arrayed as his prototype, but in the coarsest of blue jeans. He awaited with utmost patience while his father undid the traces and tied the mule. This done, the two entered the store, where many were gathered about the oblong wood stove, heated to redness, and emitting an odor characteristic of stoves in country stores—and beyond, quite beyond, any wordy de-

scription. To Punch the odor within the store was delicious, to the high-bred dame it would have been most repulsive.

The approach of the Great Holiday was manifested in the store as well as elsewhere. New additions had been added to the stock, especially in the way of toys and candies, and the ceiling fairly bristled with boots, new tinware, and new tin horns that bedazzled Punch's eyes and bewildered his brain, so that he was not quite sure what he most desired in that wealth of beautiful things.

The boy kept by his father, and he watched with utmost interest the process of having the corn measured right there in the store, and then hauled up in the loft on an improvised elevator operated by hand. Occasionally a bag of corn fell off, and would burst, scattering the corn all over the floor, narrowly escaping the head of some foot passenger who happened to be too near the opening. No such unfortunate occurrence happened to-day, however, and John's corn was measured and then paid for in jingling silver dollars, that caused the poor negro's heart to beat faster, and his eyes to glisten with delight as he held money, actual money, again. Brief was that pleasure, however, for before even half of his slender wants were supplied it was all spent.

Yard after yard of coarse cotton cloth, jeans, and calico were bought, and then shoes demanded, and the clerk stepped with alacrity to exhibit them. Solemnly the purchaser selected one pair after another, standing those chosen in a row upon the counter, until the line stretched several feet, when the clerk impatiently demanded:

"Old man, how many pairs of shoes do you want, any way?"

"I wan' dis many," indicating those in a line. "How much yer gwine charge fer all un 'em?"

The clerk settled upon a satisfactory figure, it was paid, and John, taking from the line of shoes, arrayed

as in line of battle upon the counter, a pair of heavy split-leather shoes, with brass tips, said:

"Punch, cum heah, son, an' see ef dese fit yo'." Punch obeyed, his heart leaping with delight at the prospect of a pair of shoes, a luxury which he had never before possessed, for hitherto he had gone barefoot even in winter, and the prospect of possessing the means to go out in snow and mud was glorious. The shoes did fit, and his father asked the clerk to wrap them separately, which was done, and John gave them to his son with the injunction:

"When yo' wyar dis pyar out, I 'ain' gwine buy
· 'nay 'nur'r, yo' heah me, seh."

"Yas, seh."

The child clutched the bundle and held it so tightly that his sweaty hands soon moistened the paper, and the bundle burst, so he manfully strung the shoes over his shoulder and patiently waited.

John completed his purchases by adding, among other luxuries too numerous to burden the reader with, a pound of sugar, half pound of coffee (think of it, you who want coffee made of the strength of a pound to a gallon! Yes, this was for a family of twelve, for the children would be home on Christmas), some molasses, a half gallon of rank-smelling corn whiskey, a few toys, and a little candy to top off the day's trading.

The varied purchases were deposited in the wagon and Punch was helped in after them, and in a few moments the mule was again hitched and they started homeward. By this time the sun was declining, and though warmer than in the morning, the air was still sharp. As the drive was continued homeward, the monotonous jolting of the wagon, the absence of excitement that was so plentiful in the eyes of Punch at the depot, together with his bewildered brain that sought rest, all combined to put him to sleep, which was begun on the seat. The fact was discovered by his father as the wagon jolted over a rock in the road, but he was caught just in

time to prevent him from falling beneath the wheels.

The fatherly negro prepared a rough bed of bags for his child on the floor of the wagon, laid him upon it, and covered him with the old coat. The child slept the journey's length, and dreamed constantly about shoes with brass tips, endless in their plenty, and of bewildering stores of good things that grieved him because he had not the "stomach for them all."

Nearing the farm, they were seen by the children before the house was reached, and they scampered up the road in eagerness to find what "daddy dun fotch back."

They clamored for a ride as they met the wagon, and the father stopping short, permitted them to scramble in, but unluckily started off before they had seated themselves, and there was a general mix up. Joe fell backward on a bag containing the sugar, coffee, and other stores, to the lasting ruin of two or more of the cheap toys, and the mingling of the brown sugar with the green coffee, which afterwards became the task of the unfortunate Joe to separate; still, however, she found some consolation in surreptitiously eating a lump of the sugar when nobody was looking. As Joe recovered from her fall, her father looked back with an impatient frown, and the characteristic sucking of air through his teeth, exclaimed:

"Dar now, jes' look whut yo' dun' dun'. Sot down gal, 'fo' I buss' yo' haid open.

This of course the negro had no thought of doing, and the harsh threat was no more than a remonstrance would have been from another.

The house reached, the children scrambled out of the wagon as readily as they got into it, and stood about longingly to await the opening of the good things. Polly greeted her husband with little John in her arms, who was fairly shouting with childish delight, apparently friends with everybody who showed a desire to notice him.

"Hi, yo' all don cum back er r'ady?" she questioned, and before she received an answer, Punch ran up to her with the remains of a stick of striped candy in one hand and his precious shoes in the other. He tendered the candy to his mother, who bit off a piece and crunched it with such evident delight that it made Punch's very soul feel good.

"Whut else yo' fotch home?"

Without a word the little boy, in one of the proudest moments of his life, held up his shoes.

"Cum heah ter yo' ole mammy, son. He's his mammy's man, dat 's who he is," she exclaimed as she put aside the little boy John and took Punch in her arms and kissed him, much to the envy of the other children, and especially to the infantile John, who raised his voice to an ear splitting pitch in disfavor of such favoritism.

Releasing the proud little fellow, his mother busied herself about other things, and he evaded the observation of the others and slipped out of doors and away to Mr. Morton's, where instinct seemed to aid him in finding Don, to whom he also exhibited his possessions. They entered the kitchen together, where Punch tried to put on his shoes without stockings.

"Hold on, Punch, what you doin'?" asked Don.

"Puttin' on dese heah shoes."

"Where are your socks?"

"Ain' got none,"

"Wait a minute," and Don bounded upstairs and brought down a pair of his best woolen socks, and gave them to Punch. "Here, put on these," said he; but Punch shook his head, and gave them back saying:

"Gimme er ole pyar an' I'll tek em, but mammy'll whup me ef I tek dese."

An old pair was brought, the shoes were put on and the boys went out together in search of some soft mud upon which to make tracks, which they mutually admired and commented upon. Presently

the night closed in, and the children became separated for the night, and each went to his bed.

When a great holiday like Christmas approaches, negroes mark the time by the proximity to that event. Instead of saying "December the fifteenth," it is "ten days twel Chris'mus."

A few days more brought the day before Christmas. The day dawned beautifully clear and it was very cold, but as it advanced the older people thought it looked like snow, and at the prospect the children were overjoyed. Not so their elders, for they had come to that stage in life when snow is nothing but an inconvenience which they must suffer because it is the work of Heaven.

Early in the morning John ground his axe at the grindstone, and selecting a log larger than the rest from the enormous pile of wood in the yard he began cutting up the Christmas wood. Here he patiently swung his axe, sinking it up to the eye in the soft green wood, and sending chips flying, like pieces of bursting shell, all about him. As he delivered the blows he accompanied each one with a peculiar sound, resembling that made when one walks forcibly against a post in the dark. The children were presently called to help "tote" in the wood and to pick up chips, and the alacrity with which such duties were performed at this particular time of the year, was a source of wonder to those who had seen the same little people at other times move as if their feet were leaden.

The sky now became of a dull leaden hue, characteristic of snow clouds, and the wind veered around to the northwest. Soon the children saw some "snow birds" for the first time, and to them the assurance of a snow storm was certain after seeing these little harbingers. Presently the wood dissolved from the wood-pile and appeared stacked in the chimney corner or under the steps in the house. A plentiful supply of lightwood was prepared, for this was their source of light, though lamps were used in many

a negro's house then; but light-wood was cheaper than oil, gave light as well as heat, and was often the only source of artificial light in the cabin.

Hardly had the wood been cut before the feathery snow began to fall, coming first in minute flakes, which gradually became larger and fell faster, which foreboded a deep snow to those practiced in observing the weather.

The children, especially the younger ones, could hardly contain themselves from shrieking outright, and rushed about the yard in their gambols, playfully attempting to catch the snow flakes in their wide-opened mouths. The happy possessors of new shoes took never-ending delight in walking into the freshly fallen snow, comparing tracks, and walking back and forth into the house until the floor was soggy and wet with the melted snow. This presently exhausted the patience of Polly, who reminded her offspring of their indiscretion by calling:

"Yo' Punch, whyn't yo' quit dat, bringin' all dat ar snow in heah. Ain' yo' know yo' gwine ketch yer de'th er col' fool'n' 'long dat white stuff. Cum in dis house dis minit, 'fo' I wyar ev'y bit er skin off'n de lars' one er yo'."

The children meekly obeyed, and went up to the blazing fire, where each warmed himself until nearly roasted, and as their shoes gave forth clouds of aqueous vapor their hearts swelled, that they were like grown people even in this minute respect.

The night was now coming on in gloom and silentness, for as the snow became deeper all sound was dulled, and the distant lowing of a cow was the only noise audible above the dreary moan of the wind in the bleak barren trees, that like gloomy specters stretched their bare arms beseechingly to heaven.

The fowls about the house, discouraged because of their inability to find food owing to the snow, crept one by one up their narrow stairs to roost, except a few turkeys, more fastidious than the rest,

which preferred to sleep through the night in the tree top, in spite of the storm.

Within the cabin all was life, health, warmth and light, and as the knot of light-wood was renewed from time to time, it emitted a flickering light that produced the most fantastic and exaggerated pictures upon the walls. The heaped-up logs on the rude fireplace, just renewed and bursting into flame, made a fire so cheering and delightful that it would have made a city grate-fire seem altogether useless for heating purposes.

The father came in after having fed and watered his mule, and attended to his hog, and taking off his snow covered hat whipped it on his thigh, and carelessly brushing a portion of the snow off his coat, came to the fire.

Scarcely was he settled before little John ceased playing and crawled up to his father and struggled into his lap, where he nestled in proud and silent comfort. The saucy little youngster had already learned that his domineering influence pervaded the household, and he ruled with a high hand.

While her tired husband rested, Polly was busy about a steaming hot supper, and as the skillet, containing real biscuits, had its lid lifted off, disclosing the deliciously-browned food as only a negro woman could bake it, the aroma filled the room and caused more than one to cease his occupation in hungry anticipation. The steaming coffee, the fried fresh pork floating in a miniature ocean of gravy, and the biscuits were placed on the table, and the father and the boys assembled around the board.

The father bowed his head, the children followed his example, and he briefly thanked the Almighty for his mercies. Then followed such a meal as only could follow where there was peace and contentment.

Suddenly from beneath the house came an ominous growl from the dog Nero, and as he scurried out he began barking at a furious rate, and the supper

was neglected by everybody to ascertain the cause of such a disturbance. "Hesh, Nero, hesh," came a voice from the darkness, and a figure dimly outlined in the darkness became apparent. "Dar now, dats Unc' Jim, dun' cum at lars," exclaimed the children as they recognized his voice, and the dog having ceased barking, the tired and foot-sore traveller came within the light of the doorway and into the room, covered from head to foot with snow flakes.

"Howd'y, howd'y, howd'y folks," he heartily exclaimed as he entered, shaking hands with John, and literally taking Polly in his arms and bestowing a brotherly kiss, with the inquiry, "How is yo', Sis' Polly."

Polly assured him with a beaming face that she was "sorter tol'able," though never in better health or temper in her life.

Before Jim had time to be seated before the fire, the children assailed him with claims of "Chris'mus gif', Unc' Jim; Chris'mus gif'," and the youngest and most privileged even ventured so far as to search his pockets.

"Cum outer dar, yo' rascal. Chris'mus ain' cum yit, an' heah yo' all keep er talkin' 'bout Chris'mus. I ain' seed no Chris'mus, nur Sandy Claws needer." He presently pacified the clamorous urchins with a package of striped stick-candy, which they hailed with a profound "thank-ee, seh."

"Unc'" Jim, brother of Polly, for years had been a brakeman on the only railway that passed through the county, and was looked up to in the most loyal manner by his sister and her husband, for he, possessing no family of his own, used much of his money in helping support his less fortunate brother-in-law. While his sister loved him, the children, every one of them, adored him, and they hung upon every word he uttered, and obeyed his every whim with more devotion than any slave would have done, in fact they well-nigh exalted him to the position of

a deity. At long intervals during the year "Unc" Jim would drop in unexpectedly, as in this instance, to the surprise and delight of the whole household.

It is needless to say that Punch, also, was included among his admirers; only, if it were possible, to a more excessive degree, for did he not on every occasion emulate his "Unc" Jim? Punch had been named Jim, after his uncle, when he was at the seasoned age of two years; but his predilection for red clay, and the constant desire to put something into his stomach, so distended a portion of his anatomy that the common synonym for that part was corrupted into "Punch" long before his baptismal name was thought of, so his real name very few knew, and fewer still used it.

An individual supper was prepared for the guest, and he was soon seated at table, enjoying it with untold satisfaction. As his appetite became satisfied he stretched his feet out beneath the table, and as everybody knew this was the signal for him to begin telling about his life "on de road," quietness ensued, and Punch strained his ears to catch the following account of railroading:

"Dis sho' is er bad night. De win' hit jes' blows lek it gwine cut yo' in two, but 'tain' nuttin' ter whut I'se use ter. Yo' jes' orter be wid me sumtimes when hit 's rainin' an' er freezin', an' de win' er blowin' lek it gwine tek yo' off'n dem box cyars. One night, all er suddin', while I sot up dar on er brake-w'eel stud'in' 'bout a good hot supper, an' hot fire lek dat, de ole train wus fyar talkin'.

"De engineer blowed dat whistle down-brakes, but I sho' did hate ter move; but pres'n'y, he jes' natu'lly snatch dat whistle wide open, she gin er holler lek de debble wus arter her, an' den yo' jes' orter seed dis Jim twis' dem brakes.

"De rufs er de cyars wus jes' es slick es er peeled ingan, an' ev'y minit' I wus skeered er slippin' off, an' ef I jes' had, den Jim wouldn' er bin back heah no mo'.

"Jes' es I git de brakes put on good, de train gits down de hill, an' de ole ingine 'gins ter puff an' blow lek she tired. I jes' wait er while, an' den I heah her squeal ag'in, den I got ter tek de brakes off her. Don' yo' tell me nuttin' 'bout railroadin', hit sho' is hard."

Yet, in spite of their uncle's account of the hazard and risk of life on the road, not a single boy present but dreamed some day of leading that enchanting life; nor would their uncle have exchanged it for one of any other in the world.

The supper finished, the children and their elders grouped themselves about the fire. The men smoked cob pipes, and the fragrant smoke curled above their heads and spread out in a strata like a veil so thick that it almost obscured them. Meanwhile, the children amused themselves by popping corn in the hot embers, and there was an occasional disagreement among them as to the true ownership of a particularly well-popped grain, which was peremptorily brought to a satisfactory conclusion by a series of spanks from father or mother, given indiscriminately among the belligerent youngsters.

The mother, soon after supper, resumed her knitting in the chimney-corner, slowly making cotton hosiery for her children, but never getting through, for as fast as she got around the family those first furnished were as needful of them as ever, and had long since resorted to a covering of rags for their feet. The elder children were given the task of cotton picking, which was not even omitted on Christmas Eve; and if there ever was a more soothing soporific than picking cotton, we are not acquainted with it. One by one the children crept to bed, the result of the somnolent effect of warmth, and coziness, and cotton picking—the effect most desired by the parents, for they, too, were becoming sleepy-eyed.

A long row of coarse stockings hung on the rude walls of the cabin near the fireplace, which the pos-

sessors dreamed would be filled to overflowing by "Sandy Claws."

The fire burned low, but John, conscious of the approach of the hour of lying down (negroes do not say "go to bed") even without a time-piece, put a knot on the fire. Then, taking a tattered, greasy, and finger-marked copy of the Bible from a near-by shelf, handed it to his brother-in-law, saying: "Read de Wu'd, Jim."

Jim reverently took the book, and being a more fluent reader than his brother bent forward, the book between his knees, and began reading the glorious account of the Nativity. John and Polly listened in silence. Much of the solemnly beautiful language was lost upon them, but who can say that their imaginations did not fill in whatever of the meaning that was lost. The reading over, the three reverently knelt, and John prayed. The simple earnestness of the negro in search of light was touching as his wandering and obscure speech found utterance.

Could the reader have heard the simple prayer he would have come to the conclusion, after all, that all knowledge can be summed up in simple faith. This the negro possesses to a vast degree.

The fire flickered into a dull glow that soon became dulled by the gray ashes, but before the faithful housewife lay down she covered the remaining live coals with a heap of ashes, then groped her way to bed.

Ten minutes later not a sound was to be heard except the slow, regular breathing of the sleepers and the whistling moan of the wind as it ineffectually tries to enter the cabin. Such is the beginning of a negro's Christmas.

CHAPTER V.

PUNCH LOSES HIS BEST FRIEND.

Long before dawn on Christmas morning everybody, down to the infant John, was awake, a roaring fire was kindled by one of the boys, and the excited and happy children were soon enjoying what "Ole Sandy Claws dun brought," and making such a noise withal that several times their mother had to forcibly remind them of the fact.

During the night the snow had ceased, and as John went to the door he announced: "Dar, hit 's jes' es cle'r es er bell, but jes' ax' me ef hit ain' cole." As he looked out the first rosy streaks of dawn were to be seen, and the twinkling of the morning star as it glowed like a magnificent jewel just above the roseate horizon. The patriarchal rooster from his cosy perch in the chimney corner wakened his extensive family with a shrill clarion, that caused the uncle within doors to mutter bitter invective upon his unlucky head, and to declare that "I gwine eet yo' jes' fer dat."

Jim had been partially awakened before when Tom arose to kindle the fire, and as he lay half asleep he congratulated himself upon the warmth of his quarters and the delicious sound made by the boy as he blew and blew upon the fire, and when it began to blaze the crackling and popping of the igniting wood was music to his tired soul, and he slept again, to be rudely awakened by the crowing rooster.

The ground was hidden by the accumulated covering of snow, the fences, plows and trees had all been rounded, and their rough and ugly angles given

place to the soft lines produced by snow-covered objects. The turkeys, flying down from their exalted roosting place in the trees, seemed astounded at the change wrought in a single night, and rather woefully chirped to each other, probably lamenting the prospect for breakfast, which seemed gloomy.

Presently, having all too soon found the bottom of their scantily-filled stockings, and not only found the bottom, but eaten the greater portion of the contents, the children, unable to longer forego the delights of playing in the snow, escaped their mother's eagle eye and bolted through the door. When they had remained out long enough to become chilled through, they came trooping in, each with a ball of snow, and going straight up to the fire-place, held it in the smoke from the logs, or else wiped it over the soot in the chimney, and ate it with seeming delight. Even the baby crawled to the doorway, which was open, and there ensconced himself, and after eating away the legs of a candy sheep, seemed to be trying to make amends for such treatment by offering him a snow breakfast, which so discouraged him when it was not eaten that he began to cry.

Punch's stocking contained only a small parcel of candy and a package of pop-crackers, but he felt rich, and would walk about with both "britches" pockets bulging, and for a long time strenuously opposed the firing of a single one of the precious squibs until some of the older boys had fired theirs.

Breakfast was now ready, and again the male members of the family took precedence; but before sitting down the bucket of rich, frothing egg-nog was put on the table, and John, dipping up a cup brimming full, handed it to his brother, who deliberately drained it, with gusto, and gave an exclamation of pleasure as it disappeared down his throat.

"Dat sho' is good. Yo' didn' mek no sich aigg-nog es dat, John."

"Huccum' I didn' mek hit; cyarn' I mek aigg-nog well es en'ybody?"

"Yass, but yo' didn' mek dat, jes' de same. Dat tas'e jes' lek Polly, an' I would swyar Polly meked hit; an' not on'y swyar, but swyar an' kiss er stack er Bibles she dun hit."

Jim, promptly feeling the enlivening effect of the drink, seized Polly in his arms, and began to dance about the floor, deaf to the protests of his sister, who felt that the children were laughing at her, and so they were.

"Dat I do," said Jim, as they stopped and with that he brought up from the bottom of his pockets a small box containing a gold ring set with garnets, and with an awkward bow gave it to his sister.

Taking the ring in her fingers she looked askance upon it, signifying, by her apparent suspicion, that the donor had not come by it in an honest manner.

"Whar' yo' git dis ring, Jim?"

"Yo' nummin' whar' I git hit, dar 'tis; an' I got hit fum de gittin' place," replied Jim, resenting his sister's manner by a gesture of impatience.

"I didn' stole hit, an' ef yo' don' wan' hit, jes' gimme hit back heah. I ain' gwine beg nobody ter have whut I gin' em."

"G'way, boy; didn' yo' know I wus jes' playin' wid yo', an' I said ter myse'f, dat yo' wus jes' prodjikin' when yo' gin hit ter me; an' dat yo' jes' wan' ter fool wid me er li'l' fo' yo' tek hit back. Is hit mine sho' nuff, Jim?"

"Yaas, gal, yass; an' when yo' gits tired on hit, gi' hit ter Punch."

"Thankee, seh, thankee," said Polly as she slipped the gold circlet on her finger and held it away to admire it.

"Whut hit made out er?" she asked as she slipped it off again.

"Gol', an' de man says dem 's gyarnets. Polly, I wan' yo' fer ter keep dat ring jes' es long es yo' live. I may nuver see yo' no mo'," said Jim, his voice tremulous with emotion.

After satisfying herself that the ring was indeed

hers, and honestly so, she was very happy, for it had been one of her greatest desires to possess a real gold ring, and now her heart was as light as only a negro's could be. Even John at her wedding could only give her a plain brass one, which she had worn as faithful as others wear gold ones, and now it had become a thin band of metal closely resembling the higher alloyed gold. She would wear the new ring through the Christmas holidays, she promised herself, and busily turned to her work again.

The children were allowed to taste the egg-nog, and every one of them thought it so delicious that the only thing to be regretted about it was that Christmas did not come quite often enough—and with it the accompanying sip of egg-nog.

Breakfast was soon ready, and as there was talk of a rabbit hunt, it was soon eaten. Barely was the last morsel swallowed by the last one to come to the table, before the wind of a horn was heard, followed by the cheerful yelping of the dogs, who were as eager to be on the trail as their masters.

"Dar, dar 's Dick now," said John as he listened. "Yass, I'd know dat ole big-mouf houn' er his'n es fur as I kin heah him. Dat 's him sho'. Git r'ady, boys; git r'ady, an' le's git on de ole hyar's tracks 'fo' dey git cole. Ole 'ooman, han' me down ole Betsy, fer she gwine ter talk dis day."

As his wife handed him his old musket, he cocked it, put it to his shoulder, and straightway Betsy uttered a sound that went reverberating through the woods, and enlivened the approaching hunters to such a degree that a volley of musketry, and blowing of horns, and yelping of dogs replied to the shot set off by John. The yard was soon filled with dogs, for the huntsmen had made a rendezvous of John's cabin on account of its central location, and because game was so plentiful in the locality.

The hunters were uniformly dressed in rough jeans. Few even pretended to wear overcoats, and fewer still gloves. Each man or boy carried a sin-

gle-barreled gun, though one or two pretended to a double-barreled one; but far the greater number contented themselves with an army musket, which was so heavy that it was a feat for the younger boys to even hold one of them at arm's length long enough to sight it.

The boys too young to be entrusted with guns came for the purpose of "toting" the game when killed; and with that object in view, carried blood-stained bags at their sides, supported by straps over their shoulders. Several of the younger negroes, and the older ones, too, for that matter, had had just a little bit too much of egg-nog, or "dram," and in consequence handled their arms so carelessly that a nervous person would have been constantly afraid for his life.

After John had put into his game bag a box of bright musket caps, the gourd containing shot, which were mixed, so that one charge would suit to kill any game from a wild-goose to a sparrow; and his powder contained in a glass "tickler," he slung it over his shoulder and then proceeded to charge the gun.

How Punch's eyes danced with joy as he saw preparation made for the hunt, and how eager he was to go, but he knew better than to ask, so consoled himself by getting as near the gun as possible, where he gently patted the stock, pulled the glittering brass trigger-guard, and wished so much that he was a man.

"Let dat 'lone an' tek yo' han' off'n dat gun, Punch, 'fo' hit go off an' kills sumbody daid. Er gun is er dan'us thin'. She's dan'us 'dout lock, stock, er barr'l. Now yo' jes' go 'way fum dar."

Punch recoiled some distance and silently watched the loading process. John poured the black powder into a little conical heap in his hand, and thence into the gun, and rammed it home with a rag wad. Then the shot followed, and as he poured them into his hand he spat upon them, and

muttering "I wan' yo' ter fetch me whut yo' go arter," poured them into the gun and rammed them home with the heavy iron ram-rod, and then capping the gun, slung it over his shoulder after going out of doors, for it was bad luck to shoulder a gun in the house.

"Cum 'long, boys; I gwine kill two ole hyars ter yo' all's one," he called as he strode off over the snow-covered field, followed by the crowd of men and boys.

Nobody carried any provisions for the noon meal, for they intended killing enough game to satisfy their wants at that hour.

Before the hunters had gone a hundred yards from the house a number of rabbit's tracks are seen. A hunter singles out the tracks of one, and proceeds to follow the intricate trail of the rabbit, announcing now and then to himself, "heah she goes," "dar she goes." Then he perceives the tracks enter an impenetrable thicket. He stalks around it, but finding no emerging tracks, calls his dog, that is trailing another track. "Heah, Dash, heah!" The dog pricks up his ears and comes bounding. "Look fer 'im, boy!" calls his master, pointing to the thicket of bamboo briars. The dog scrambles into the thicket, and as his master stands alert, with the gun cocked, the pursued rabbit bursts forth at the most unexpected place, and making a bound of several feet passes immediately between the legs of the huntsman. Before he is able to wheel about and fire, the intended victim is out of reach.

"Dar now, ef dat don' beat de debble! Stan' heah lek er blame fool an' let dat ole hyar do me dataway. Nummin', nex' time yo' jes' tek keer, an' don' git so clos' ter me, an' I gwine show yo' whut I kin do," he bitterly soliloquized.

Before the rabbit found cover, half a dozen shots had been fired at her; but not until she had come within shot of John did she receive the fatal charge that brought her down.

"Didn' I tol' yo' all I gwine kill 'em," proudly spoke the fortunate shot as he raised the struggling little animal into view. "Dat 's right, Henry, yo' jes' git 'em up an' I'll show yo' natu'lly how ter kill ole hyars."

Everybody laughed at the chagrin of Henry, who had so often boasted of his wonderful marksman-ship; and now that all had seen his ridiculous position, he sullenly answered the jocular words of John by saying:

"I don' wan' non' er yo' showin', er nuttin'; an' 'ka'se I didn' kill er ole po' hyar, tain' no reason dat I cyarn'."

There was no reply from John, who treated the boy's ill-tempered words with silence, and continued the hunt.

Presently another rabbit is jumped along a deep ditch bank. There are hunters on both sides. "Bang! Bang!" go the guns, and still the scared rabbit flies on untouched, and approaches Henry, who hears the light touch of the rabbit's feet as they crush through the dry grass. He determines to make sure this time, and his gun is at his shoulder. As the rabbit pauses an instant on seeing him he takes brief aim, the hammer falls, the cap on his musket explodes, the hare bounds away, and with the profoundest exclamation of disgust he is in the act of taking the gun from his shoulder when "bang" it goes, and a scream of agony proceeds from the opposite ditch bank.

"Gre't Gawd! whut is de marter wid dis heah ole gun? Hit looks lek hit gwine fer ter tek er week 'fo' it gwine go off. Dar, wunder whut I dun now!"

"Henry, yo' 'se de biggis' fool I ever seed shoot er gun. O Lawdy! Aw my laig! aw my laig! I 'se dun kilt now jes' es sho's yo' bo'n. Cum heah, sum-body! Run heah, quick!" shrieked the voice.

Several ran to the succor of the wounded man, who had thrown down his gun and was writhing in pain on the snow, which was bloody from the

wounds. A companion hastily stripping up his "britches" legs, a few shot fell out, and several had penetrated into the calf muscles; but very little harm was done, despite the moans and lamentations of the victim. When the wounded man was made aware of the slightness of his injuries, he forgot his pain, and directed his attention to ridiculing Henry, who all this time stood listlessly looking on with a scared look, his black face so changed that it looked as if ashes had been dusted upon it.

"Dus my laig look lek er hyar?"

"I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd I didn' go ter hu't yo'; an' dat ole gun er mine hong fyer an' leetle mo' kicked me over arter I took her 'way!" declared Henry in a scared voice.

"Look er heah, boy, de nex' time yo' go huntin' yo' git er gun dat 's gwine off w'en yo' pull de trigger, 'ka'se when er gun fergits ter shoot hit 's a danj'us thing, 'ka'se she mought go off an' sumbody git hu'ted," advised Abe. Having delivered this sage advice, he staunched the blood with some pieces of rags and continued the hunt just as if nothing had happened.

The hunters now continued their quest for game, and before sunset the whole party turned their steps homeward with a generous abundance of hares, partridges, a wild goose or two, and even a muskrat. They stopped a few minutes at a spring to rest, and began to shoot at "blacks," that is, a blazed spot on a tree. All present took a shot or two at the target, except Henry, who seemed to be awaiting an opportunity to pay back in a most impressive manner the affronts inflicted upon him during the day.

"Dat ain' no shootin' er 'tall. I kin do better 'n dat wid water, let er lone powder 'n shot. Shucks!"

"Waal, waal, if dat boy ain' de biggis' liar, es well es fool, I uver seed, den I 'se de biggis' liar dat uver bre'thed de bref er life!" said the astonished John.

"I b'lieve he gwine crazy. Talk 'bout shootin'

wid water—he mus' be er fool, er he thinks we all one. Shootin' wid water; huh, huh, huh!" laughed the wounded Abe.

The whole group laughed a jolly chorus, and several began to prod the imperturbable Henry with the accidents of the morning; but he preserved a sullen demeanor, and as he had been rather unsuccessful in the hunt, he was not in the humor for joking.

"I means jes' whut I say, an' I kin knock de crown outer eny hat in dis crowd de ve'y fus' time, wid my ole gun loaded wid nuttin' but powder 'n water."

A half dozen hats were cheerfully offered, among them those of Abe's and John's.

"No, Abe, I dun' hu't yo' nuff ter-day, an' I ain' gwine shoot er hole thoo' yo' hat," said Henry as he put Abe's hat aside and accepted the bran-new one that John had just bought, with a malicious smile as if certain of accomplishing his purpose.

"I ain' gwine do dis fer nuttin', an' now who gwine bet me I cyarn' tek de crown outer dis heah hat?"

"Dar now! I dun said he gwine back out, 'ka'se hit bad luck ter bet," chuckled John. "But I lay yo'," added he, "dat wil' goose 'g'inst er hyar dat yo' cyarn."

"An' I lay yo' er dozen pota'ges 'g'inst a ginger-cake," volunteered another scrupulous but hazardous fellow.

The stakes were offered at such heavy odds against the accomplishment of the feat that in event Henry won he would have all the game and the rest very little to show for their day's hunt, so he generously made them divide the amount of their bet in half and the stakes were laid in two piles beneath a tree.

"Now, den, I gwine bet yo', an' ef I don' do whut I say I gwine do, den I nuver gwine shoot dis heah ole gun no mo' long es I live an' yo' all kin 'vide de game I is got 'twix' yo', fer I nuver gwine tech her no mo' ef she don't stan' by me dis time," announced

Henry as he placed the gun to his shoulder and discharged it in the air.

With wonder bordering on derision the boy was watched by his companions as he charged the gun with powder as usual, put in a heavy wad of paper, which he rammed home well, and after cocking the gun placed on a cap and let the hammer down again; then, deliberately taking his soft hat from his head for a dipper, he stooped at the spring and filled the barrel to the muzzle with water.

"I 'se r'ady; th'ow de hat up," called Henry.

Up went the hat, but Henry failed to fire, and it fell unharmed to the ground. There was a roar of jeers, but Henry stepped forward and took up the hat, saying:

"Dat ain' de way fer ter fling er hat. Look!"

With a quick sling he cast the hat high into the air, brought the musket to his shoulder, and as the hat fell on a level with his eyes, pulled the trigger, and a flash, followed by the mingled sound of an explosion and hissing steam, aroused the echoes in the hills. When the smoke had cleared away not a fragment of John's new hat was to be found that was large enough to cover his own palm.

"Dar, now, ef dat don' beat de debble he'self!" exclaimed the surprised John as he surveyed with rising wrath the remnants of his hat.

"Boy, ain' yo' dun dun nuff debblement dis day 'dout gwine 'bout shootin' folks an' dey hats lek dat. Dat ain' no way ter do. Dar de ole goose, tek hit!" and with ill-temper rampant, John shouldered ole Betsy and strode off bareheaded.

"Hol' on, Unc' John; heah yo' goose. I don' wan' hit, nowhow; an' dat ain' all, I ain' gwine tek none er dem burds, 'ka'se I didn't kilt nay one un 'em. I jes' bet wid yo' all fer fun."

John paused, and then turned around upon hearing Henry speak; and as Henry held up the goose to him, he silently took it; then absent-mindedly put up his hand to adjust his hat, but, finding none there,

he tried to change the gesture so that the boys might not notice it, but failed lamentably.

"Huh, huh!" laughed Henry. "Is we eben 'bout dat ole hyar yit, Unc' John?"

"G'way, yo' aggervatin' debble!" he muttered with a grin. John, upon saying this and regaining the wagered goose, which he had already made up his mind to give to "Mis'" Morton, soon became appeased, and his abounding good nature became ascendant again.

Already the length of this chapter should warrant its close right here, but the interest centered upon the hunt has stretched it to such a length that we fear the title has been rather misplaced; yet, with the reader's permission, we shall have something to say concerning one of the most important events in the history of our hero.

That the day's hunt does not sum up the whole of the pleasures of Christmas Day, it is scarcely needful to say; for as night approaches, John's cabin becomes filled to overflowing with happy young men and women who have come a distance through the snow to be present at the dance.

It seems rather incongruous to say that prayers are held one night, and on the night following a dance; but such was sometimes the case, for the elder people, not being very strict adherents to church or biblical law, permitted in their children license that they denied themselves, and in consequence a dance rounds out this day of festivity.

Sometime we shall look in on one of these merry gatherings and tell what we saw there.

Three days after the events recorded above had taken place, a chilling rain scarcely more than a drizzle began falling, and its dreary effect told upon any brute or being that ventured forth in it. The snow first began to melt and trickle away in tiny streams, leaving the earth beneath soggy, slippery, and miry. As darkness shut out the light the feeble heat of the sun was withdrawn, and the gentle rain

froze as it fell, and encased every object in a sheet of glistening crystal. It was one of those nights that are dreaded by comfort-loving persons who seem to take infinite pleasure in occasionally pausing in their occupation and going to the door to permit the fine rain to fall in their faces, to inhale the breath of the night, to try in vain to distinguish objects in the darkness, and satisfied in these particulars, to give a self-congratulatory shudder and return to their book or occupation by the fire. The blackness upon this particular night would have been well nigh impenetrable, had it not been for the peculiar light-giving qualities of the snow.

The Christmas festivities had well-nigh worn even the mirth-loving Brooks family threadbare, and the family had "laid down" early. Jim had returned to his perilous life on "de road" the day before, and one or two of the older children had gone back again to their work on the neighboring farms.

In the middle of this dismal and frightful night there reached the ears of Mr. Morton an indistinct noise that awakened him. Hastily jumping out of bed, he raised a window, and saw that John's cabin was on fire.

Borne along by the merciful night wind, Flournoy Morton heard with a thrill of anguish the wailing, as if of a lost soul; the cries of the poor negro:

"He'p, he'p! Gre't Gawd A'mighty, he'p!"

Listening to hear no more, Mr. Morton hastily slipped on his trousers and shoes, and, deaf to the entreaty of his wife to stop for more clothing, he was out of doors in a twinkling and running with break-neck speed down the slippery hill toward John's cabin. The branch between the two hills was reached, and as he pursued his course up the hill the slippery ice impeded his progress, so that when he reached the blazing house he was almost exhausted.

Poor John was rushing madly up and down before the house, half clad, but insensible to the cold, and

so utterly panic-stricken that his faculties had deserted him. Hearing the rapid approach of Mr. Morton, he looked around, recognized him, and flung himself on his face at his feet, and in an agony of sobs and halting words implored his friend to save his wife and children.

"Oh, Marse Flo'noy, please, seh, save 'em, save 'em! O Lawd, look down on dis po' sinner, I pray! Please, seh, marster, save 'em!" frantically urged the negro, staying the progress of the rescuer by getting in the way.

"Get out of the way, you blamed fool, and stop your hollerin'! Go and get a bucket of water and see if you can't stop the fire somewhat until I can get the children out," said Mr. Morton hastily as he rushed into the burning house.

The lower room was densely filled with choking smoke, but for the present the flames were confined to the upper loft, though burning brands had already begun falling to the lower floor. With rare presence of mind he had taken a deep draught of air before entering, and had held his breath and shut his eyes. Groping about in the blistering heat and stifling air, he at last found a bed. Upon recognizing it, he hastily snatched the two unconscious children in his arms, and, going across to the other bed, he felt for Polly but found only Punch. He quickly caught him up, and made a dash for the door and for life; but he had forgotten where it was and his air was nearly spent when it was found. Rushing into the open air, he roughly put down the children, without stopping to see if they were dead or alive, and heedless of John, who had fallen there on his knees by his children and was fervently giving utterance to thanks for their safety, for the time wholly unconscious that Polly was still in the burning house.

"John, where is Polly? Don't you hear me, nigger? Where is Polly?"

Speech had deserted John for a moment. There

was a gulping effort to regain it, and, failing to do so, the bereaved negro raised his hand piteously toward the burning house, and the one word "dar" escaped his lips before he fell unconscious on the ice.

Into the house Mr. Morton again ventured though the roof was falling in and the wind was fanning the flames to a furious heat. Feeling certain that Polly was not on the lower floor, he hastily sprang up the ladder. Burning pieces of wood fell upon him, but he continued his perilous climb, although his coat was on fire in several places. The loft reached, he opened his eyes, and there, in the glaring light, saw the insensible body of Polly prone on the floor, with her clothing on fire. Quickly pulling her to the opening of the stairway, he carried her down stairs on his shoulder and placed her in safety by the children. Then administering a no gentle kick to John, who was still unconscious, looked up in time to see Punch disappear in the blazing doorway.

"That boy is the most infernal fool I ever did see. Punch, Punch!" he called, but no answer, and still the boy remained in the house. "Well, if a nigger deliberately walks into hell, he ought to stay there," he was thinking; but, getting no reply to his repeated call, it was but the work of a moment for him to again enter the blazing house, to find Punch prostrate on the floor (whither the boy had gone in his bewilderment, just as horses have been known to do), and to bring him safely away, taking the precaution this time to shut the already flaming door.

When Mr. Morton returned with the dazed Punch to where he had left John and his wife, he found that the form had regained consciousness, and from the piteous wails that arose he discovered the two youngest children shivering with cold and fright, nestling in the bosom of their mother. John, seeing

his wife lying prostrate and immovable on the ice, began shaking and calling her.

"Wake up, Polly; wake up! Hi, Polly, don' sleep soun' lek dat."

A look of profound fear and grief overspread the benign face of John as the truth began to dawn upon him. With a hoarse and unnatural cry of unutterable agony, poor John fell on the body of his wife in mental suffering too bitter to find relief in tears.

Mr. Morton was himself moved more than he would dare confess as he looked upon the suffering negro; and, fearing to trust himself further, took the children nearer the fire, where he made a seat for them.

Before long the neighbors began to assemble and as Melchizedek made his appearance, Mr. Morton called to him:

"Chizedek, go over to the house, hitch the wagon up, and tell my wife to send my clothes; and come back here quicker than you ever did anything in your life. You know where the gear is, don't you? Hold on—tell your Miss Margaret to send a bed and some bed clothes, too. Now hurry up!"

"Yas, seh."

Melchizedek went off at a lively pace, and return with not only the articles ordered, but Mrs. Morton herself, and Don also, in a remarkably short time.

The remains of the faithful wife were taken to the Morton home, and the children also, to remain until other quarters could be provided for them.

Before the wagon was ready to leave, the cabin had burned to a glowing heap of logs, that sent myriads of sparks as they tumbled over one another and shed a bright glow on those gazing idly at the fire.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER THE FIRE.

The neighbors remained about the scene of the fire until every vestige of the cabin had burned away, commenting upon the probable cause, the remarkable rapidity with which its destruction took place, and the probable cause of poor Polly's death.

Strange as it may seem, nothing was said of the daring bravery of Mr. Morton, but the reason for this was that John, the only witness to it, except the children, had gone with the wagon. Those alone remained who might have informed them of it, except Mr. Morton himself, for he, after seeing that the stable was in no danger from the sparks, departed for his home, probably forgetting that he had done anything in particular. It is certain that the neighbors would not have known anything if John, in words of unbounded praise and admiration, had not declared :

"Marse Flo'noy is de braves' man I uver see,
'ka'se he fotch all un 'em out er dar when de roof
wus er fallin' in!"

His hearers listened with wonder akin to fear of a white man who deliberately faced almost certain death to rescue a negro family from the most frightful of all deaths, and the name that had been so dear to them hitherto became doubly so now, when abundant proof had been given that he would as gladly risk his life for them as for any member of his own race.

The remains of Polly were prepared for burial at the Morton home that night by several officious old women who took charge of affairs, much to the relief

of Mrs. Morton, who had her hands full in caring for the children, for Mary, their sister, was so overcome by grief that she could do little else beside sit by the kitchen fire and bemoan her misfortune. So she spread a pallet of soft quilts on the floor before the fire, and one by one tenderly laid the children upon it, for they had long since succumbed to overpowering slumbers. Here, watched by their father and sister, they slept till morning.

When the first rays of daylight appeared through the bedimmed window, John, with bowed head and sorrowful face, went out and wandered toward the spot where grief had come to him in an overwhelming flood.

First among those in the house, where preparations had sometime since been made for the burial, was Elvira Stovall, destined to become an essential personage in this story. She was a woman of probably thirty years of age, though by no means certain on this point herself. She had been made a widow two years before, her husband dying suddenly; and while it was known that her married life was not happy, it was generally believed that her husband was the exciting cause. Elvira was looked upon as rather fiery-tempered by all her neighbors, but she appeared to be industrious and capable, and affectionate to children, who nevertheless appeared to dislike her, and would disengage themselves from her embrace at the earliest moment. She was a woman of few acquaintances, as she had not visited much since her husband's death. Being unencumbered by children, she had lived at several farm houses in the neighborhood as cook, and was generally considered a good housekeeper.

Elvira was very black, and very tall and strong, and as lithe as a man, and her long muscular arms had won victory over men in fisticuffs again and again. Her head was masculine in form, with a receding brow, and covered with an abundance of kinked black hair, that on week days was kept

wrapped tightly in little shocks all over her head, making that particular member bristle like a porcupine. On Sunday the shocks had their pieces of strings removed and the hair combed until every hair stood out separately, which made the owner look like a Fiji Islander.

She rarely smiled, and while her face was not unpleasant to look upon, her high cheek bones, grayish-brown eyes, flattened nose, and her lower maxilla projecting beyond the upper slightly, gave her the air of being determined. When she did laugh, a row of brilliant teeth showed beneath lips thin for an Ethiopian. These teeth were set in gums that looked as if they had been stained with blackberries.

Apparently from pure disinterestedness Elvira had come to aid, if possible, in relieving the distress of the unfortunate victims of the fire. Therefore, since we have no proof positive that her motives were not self-seeking, let us at least believe good of her.

The morning was a dismal one, with the rain coming down in an unending drizzle, and the thawing snow made of the fields, yard, and roads one immense miry morass.

John, upon reaching the ruins of his house, saw that a number of his friendly neighbors had come to offer their sympathy, and not this alone, but substantial evidence of their esteem in the way of clothing, shoes, and even money.

"No, Peter, I cyarn' tek yo' clo's an' money when yo' is in need on 'em jes' es bad es I is," said John in reply to an offer from old Peter Hamlet; "fer I wan' let all er yo' know dat I ain' gwine wan' fer nuttin' es long es I stay on dis heah place. 'Ka'se when I 'se in tr'uble lek I 'se now, I knows jes' whar ter go, an' dats ter Marse Flo'noy. I sho' is 'blige ter yo' all, but ef de house dun bu'nt up, de lan' dar yit, an' I gwine have er house put right back dar ag'in."

The sense of comfort that such a thought gave him for a moment caused him to forget his grief, but when his thoughts again reverted to that subject, he silently bowed his head and walked sadly away through the rain to Mr. Morton's.

That gentleman had just risen from the table, where a steaming breakfast had hardly been touched, so busily had he been thinking of John and the sudden disaster that had befallen him. He had been unusually silent, too, and his wife and son had scarcely spoken during the meal. Mr. Morton emerged from the door as John came into the yard unconscious of being seen, and gave a start of surprise when Mr. Morton addressed him:

"Hey, John, have you lost your senses to go paddling around here in the wet? What good do you think you can do by going over there. The old house is gone, and I am glad of it. I'll have another one built just as soon as the weather opens. Come in the house by the fire, and don't stand there shivering like a half-drowned rooster."

"Marse Flo'noy, dis de fus' chance I had ter tell yo' how much I'se 'bliged ter yo' fer helpin' me out lars' night. I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd I wus so skeered dat I didn' have one grain er sense! An' I know jes' es well es' I'se standin' heah, dat onless yo' had hyeard me when yo' did, dat all on 'em would er been bu'nt up. Gawd bless yo', Marse Flo'noy! Please, seh, shake hands. Ef I is a nigger, I got feelin's, an' ef dar 's anybody on dis green yearth dat I love mo' dan yo', he nur she ain' livin'."

Flournoy Morton's voice changed to one less firm and commanding, and there was a faint tremor in it as he said kindly:

"Stop, John. I have done no more for you than any other man would have done under the circumstances. Now, go on into the house and dry yourself, and Mary will give you some breakfast."

John entered the house, and Mr. Morton, buttoning his heavy coat about him, walked out to

the stable, from whence he soon sent a messenger to an old negro named Neely Boyd, who was the neighborhood carpenter, telling him to come immediately. Then, finding Melchizedek, he said: "'Chizedek, I want you to take old Neely, after he gets through making the coffin, and you and he go to work and see if you can't fix up that old house Peter used to live in over yonder. It must be almost in ruins, but at any rate John must have somewhere to stay until his house is built. Do it and I will settle with you."

"Yas, seh; but dat ole house is purty nigh gone, Mis' Morton. 'Tain' got er bit er kiver on it, and de chimly dun fell down, an'—"

"And what?" sharply asked Mr. Morton.

"Nuttin'. I wus jes' gwine ter say dat dat ole house is ha'nted."

"Haunted? The devil you say! Who told you so?"

"I fergit now who 'twus tol' me dat dey seed er light dar tur'r night, but dey say 'twus er fac', an' no lie needer."

"Well, 'Chizedek, you have too much sense to believe such lies. You have my word that no 'ha'nts' ever were, are, or ever will be in that house, and if you hear anybody say there is, you have my leave to choke them until they confess they lie. You know that if John heard this, he would not live in the house; and the weather is too bad to either move or build a house now. So do as I tell you. Get the wagon and haul the shingles over there, and then I will show you what lumber to take from the barn."

Melchizedek did as he was bidden, and when the day closed everything was ready for the old carpenter to go to work next morning. Within an hour or two after breakfast there was a gentle rap on the kitchen door, and Mr. Morton, who had been talking to John, opened it, and there, with all the courtly breeding belonging to a half century ago,

stood old Neely, soaked with rain, with mud-covered feet, and bowing with uncovered head, upon whose bald surface the rain spattered.

"Good mornin', Marse Flo'noy. How yo' cum erlong? I ain' seed yo' in Gawd knows how long."

"Come into the house, old man, and you can bow and scrape in here without getting wet."

Could a stranger to the negro race have seen this old man enter the house, he would have been very much impressed. First, it took him fully five minutes at the door mat, where he endeavored to get every single bit of mud off his coarse and badly-worn shoes, the meanwhile talking volubly; next, his old hat was laid upon the floor. This old hat, which had once been black, was now of that ugly and indescribable color characteristic of cur dogs, and was completely devoid of shape. His overcoat was once the property of a Yankee soldier, but its former owner would never have recognized it after the years of exposure to the elements and changes wrought by frequent patching. This, all soaked with rain, he deposited carefully by the side of the hat, and then suddenly stopped talking, and waited, just as if Mr. Morton had been a sovereign and he the subject.

"Old man, I sent for you because John has had the bad luck to lose his wife and to have his house burnt at the same time."

"Hesh, Marsh Flo'noy. I ain't heyard nay wu'd 'bout it. Dat sho' is er pity." Then the kind old negro turned to John and said in a tone entirely different to the morning greeting: "I sho' is sorry fer yo', John; but yo' know dat de Scripter say, 'De Lawd gives an' he takes away; bless' be de name er de Lawd.' An' he gwine tek keer yo', jes' so yo' don't fergit Him. 'Watch an' pray,' say de Lawd."

How applicable or accurate the quotations, it is left the reader to decide.

Fearing to trust his voice, John said nothing, and

Mr. Morton informed Neely that he was called upon to make a coffin for the dead. The old carpenter had brought with him a few tools, but before proceeding to work he measured the body. Instead of using a rule, which was accounted bad luck, he used a sapling, and having made record of his measurements by making a series of notches, he went out to a shed in the yard and began his work upon the narrow house intended for Polly.

Directly the sound of the hammer and saw reached the ears of Punch and Don, they left off playing and ran out to the shed to watch "Unc" Neely.

The old man built a fire, and then, taking a long pine board, put it on the bench and began to ply his plane, the while crooning a dismal hymn, particularly suited to the day and the work at which he was engaged.

"What yo' doin', Unc' Neely?" asked Don.

"Whut I doin'? Whar' yo' manners, Don?"

"Good mornin', Unc' Neely. I forgot that time," said Don.

"Whut yo' stan'in' dar er sayin' nuttin' fer? Whar' yo' manners, boy? Dey mus' er got bun't up." This to Punch.

"Good mornin', Unc. Neely."

"Dat 's er man! Yo' leetle mo' ter git bu'nt up lars' night, didn' yo, son?" asked Neely.

"Yas, seh. Whut yo' mekin', Unc' Neely?"

"I'se mekin' lar'fers ter ketch medlers."

"Sho' 'nuff, Unc' Neely, whut yo' mekin'?"

"I'se mekin' er box."

"You goin' to give it to me after it is finished?" asked Don.

"Nuh, I ain' gwine gi' hit ter yo', 'ka'se 'tain' time fer yo' ter have a box lek dis gwine be."

"What kind of box will it be, Unc' Neely?"

"Hit er gwine ter be a coffin; dat de kin' er box hit gwine be."

"You makin' a coffin for Aunt Polly?" asked Don.

"Um-huh," replied Neely.

This appeared to satisfy the boys, and they amused themselves for hours playing with the blocks and shavings.

Punch looked upon the gruesome object with idle curiosity as it assumed its shape; nor did he suffer the sorrow that he would have done had he been older. It was not until old Neely had finished his work, and he saw with astonishment that his mother was to be placed in her narrow bed, that his childish love for her broke over all restraint. Then he passed out of the house, where the constant moving about of so many strangers, who scarcely spoke louder than a whisper, conveyed such an air of mystery to the poor, terror-stricken child that he could withstand it no longer, so he fled. Several hours later, after a prolonged search, he was found by one of the searchers fast asleep in the stable loft at home, where he had cried himself to sleep, as the dried tears on his cheeks proved.

"Whut dey gwine do wid mammy, daddy?" the child asked as he recognized his father.

"Dey gwine ter be'y her in de groun', son; an' den she gwine on ter glory..."

"Whut dey gwine ter be'y her fer? I wan' her."

"Dat so, son; but Ole Marster say she dun live long 'nuff in dis worl', an' He dun call her home, so she had ter go. Same as I an' yo' an' ev'ybody else got ter do sum er dese days."

With this the father took his son by the hand and led him away.

A few days later the wind was blowing sharp and cold, the sky overcast with gloomy clouds, and the snow had almost disappeared. The coming of the New Year had scarcely been thought of by those engaged in the sad duty at hand.

Early in the morning old Peter had gone with an assistant to a clump of sassafras bushes crowning the crest of a hill overlooking the river. Later a growing pile of red clay, accompanied by the

rhythmic blows of a grubbing hoe, bespoke his occupation. His work finally completed, he rekindled his wan ing fire, and awaited the coming of the funeral procession.

As he watched, he saw wending its way out of the woods surrounding the house the long black line, with here and there a dash of color produced by the scarlet shawls of some female attendant. The cortege was led by a single wagon, drawn by John's faithful mule. In the wagon was carried the dead, in the plain unpainted coffin. Everybody was on foot, and as the grave was reached, the pall-bearers reverently uncovered, and, stepping softly, removed the burden from the wagon and lowered it into the grave by means of plow lines. Then the noble old Israel Bacon assumed his place at the head of the grave, with his face toward the east, and although more than eighty years of age, he slowly removed his hat and placed it on the ground beside him, and remained so throughout the service, fearless of the bleak wind and forgetful of his weight of years. All present that had not done so, followed his example, including Mr. Morton, who, with his wife, had come to the burial.

The patriarchal old man read the burial service haltingly, but most impressively, and without glasses, and then, quoting from memory, he lined off a hymn familiar to all present. The singing began, and then was wafted away on the chill wind the first notes of the song, at first scarcely audible, then increasing in volume until the distant hills re-echoed the music. At the last line of the verse the closing notes reminded one of the weird, unearthly and angelic music of the *Æolian harp*.

The thunderous peal of a mighty cathedral organ, with its overwhelming melody, can never arouse the hidden recesses of the soul to more enthusiasm than the singing by untutored negroes at one of their funerals.

After the singing a simple prayer was said by the

old preacher, who devoutly kneeled upon the ground, never thinking of personal comfort when the service of the Master was to be done. For had he not years and years ago had the ice broken when he was baptized, and had he not repeatedly done likewise for many candidates since, and thought nothing of it.

The grave was now filled, and as the red earth approached the top, a rough stone was put at the head and another at the foot, neither bearing any mark. In a few years Polly will have been forgotten, and no mark will exist upon the face of the earth making known to future generations that she lived, was happy in living, and died.

A few days' work on the cabin formerly occupied by old Peter again made it habitable, and John was told by Mr. Morton that he could move whenever he was ready.

Practically nothing was saved from the fire, so clothing, shoes and cooking utensils, as well as bedding, had to be bought, and again John had to appeal to his benefactor for aid. So when the day came for moving, John bore a troubled face, and seemed uneasy and restless. At last he asked to speak to Mr. Morton.

"Well, John, haven't you moved yet?" asked he as he came out in the yard where John was waiting.

"Nor, seh, dat I ain'."

"What in the thunder are you waiting for, then? Why don't you move? I won't house and feed you here a life-time."

"I knows dat, Marse Flo'noy, but huccom' I ain' move' is 'ka'se I ain' got nuttin' ter move, 'cep'in' de shu't on my back, er ole pyar britches, er cote, an' de chillun, an' I sho' is 'shamed ter ax' yo' fer nuttin' else; 'ka'se I know I nuver git out er yo' debt ag'in es long es I live. Den I ain' got nowhar' ter move."

"John, where have you been?"

"I ain' been nowhar, seh. Huccom yo' ax' me whar' I bin?"

"Haven't you been over to old Peter's house yet?"

"Nor, seh, I ain' bin nigh dar."

"Well, let's walk over there and see what you need," said Mr. Morton as he strode out of the yard.

"Hi! dar smoke cumin' out de chimly. I heah dem say dat dat ole house is ha'nted, an' dat sho' dus look lek hit. Jes' 'fo' Chrismus dat ole house wus jes' es ramshackly, an' de chimly dun fell down, an' now jes' look! Mos' er bran-new house dun meked outer de ole one. Whut dat fer?"

"Well, old Neely and 'Chizedek did it, and you don't think they are 'ha'nts', do you? I forgot to tell you that I had told them to put the old house in repair so that you could live there until your own house is finished. Where in the world have you been, that you knew nothing of the work being done?" He asked this with a self-conscious chuckle as he saw that his plan had worked well. It was he who had forbidden anybody to tell of the surprise he was to astonish the negro with. It was he also that had by some pretense or other kept John about the house during the time the work was being done.

"I ain' sca'cely been outer de house fer mos' er week, dat's huccom' I ain' know'd nuttin' 'bout nuttin'."

By this time the house was reached and Mr. Morton knocked on the door. There was the sound of approaching feet, the door was flung wide open, and there in the door way stood Elvira, who stepped aside to permit Mr. Morton and his companion to pass.

"Hi, gal, whar' you' cum fum enyhow? I didn't know yo' wus in er mile er dis place. Hi, heah Punch, an' John, an' Sue, an' er fyer, an' bed, an' er table! Whar dey cum fum, gal? I know yo' ain' got no money ter buy 'em wid."

"How yo' know whut I got, yo' nappy-haid nigger? I kin buy an' sell yo' time an' ag'in—"

"I heah talk er yo' buyin' an' sellin' er folks! Humph! Whut yo' dun dun wid dem yo' dun bought 'fo' now?"

"Nummin', yo'," she said, with a vexatious shake of her head.

"Elvira, have you brought all of the things from home, and have you got anything to eat in the house?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Yas, seh, dat I is; an' I gwine cook dat nigger sich er supper pres' n'y hit gwine put ernur'r kink in his hyar."

"Hol' on, hol' on! What dis mean? I ain' prodjikin' now, I ain'. Whose house is dis, Marse Flo'noy?"

"It is yours, John."

"Marse Flo'noy!"

"Get up, John. What! Nigger, don't kneel to me."

"I clar 'fo' Gawd—"

Here John's ability to utter words was lost, and he sobbed his thanks. Flournoy Morton felt very happy, and, seizing the first opportunity, made his escape, and went off whistling an air that had never been heard before, nor probably ever will be again.

CHAPTER VII.

A YEAR AFTER.

It is necessary to return for a moment to the scene with which the last chapter closed.

Mr. Morton had taken his departure, as we have already noted, and John, not quite having recovered from his surprise, stood looking about as if uncertain whether to remain or to fly from such sorcery that could within so short a time establish him in a home more comfortable than the one he had lost, and without his knowledge in the bargain.

"Whut yo' stan'in' dar gyarp'n' lek er barn do' fer, nigger? Set down outer my way," said Elvira, looking over her shoulder, and speaking to John while she kneaded the bread for supper. John was not the least in the way where he stood, but Elvira felt she must say something, so she said this.

"Hi, gal, whut yo' doin' over heah?" asked John.

"Hi gal' ain' my name, an', Mister Brooks, when yo' wan' ter speak ter me, I'se Mrs. Stovall."

"Humph! dat so? When yo' git so pertickler dat I cyarn' call yo' Viry?"

"My name ain' Viry, needer."

"I don' keer whut 'tis, I been heah yo' talk un es Viry, an' I gwine ter call yo' dat er nuttin' else; yo' heah me?"

"Huccom' yo' heah, I ax' yo'?"

"Dat ain' none er yo' biz'ness. Yo' mus' think I ain's got nuttin' ter do but answer yo' questions."

"Ain' yo' er gittin' er good supper cooked ter put in dat black skin er your'n; ain' yo' got er clean house an' a good fyer; an' de chillun, ain' dey got clo's on, an' whar would dey been ef yo' had de

keer un 'em? An' den yo' keep axin' 'huccom' yo' heah?" I let yo' know dis much, I ain' heah 'ka'se de love er yo' fotch me; but Mis' Morton begged me jes' es hard fer ter cum, dat 's huccom' I heah."

It may be necessary to say that Elvira's statement was not altogether true, for it was she who asked Mrs. Morton if she could not help the poor motherless children, and adroitly left out the wifeless husband, as if he were totally unworthy of consideration.

"I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd, Viry, I don' mean nuttin' I say. I jes' wan' see ef yo' git mad es'y lek dey say yo' dus."

"Ef dat 's whut yo' 's arter, I wouldn' er open' my mouf ter save yo' life." Here Elvira pretended that she resented this test of her good temper, and lapsed into a silence that John could not coax her out of, and she answered his questions in sullen and curt monosyllables.

"Wunder whut I gwine do wid dese chillun when I go ter wu'k. I cyarn' stay in de house now, an' Mary she cyarn' lef' Mis' Morton, an' dat gal Joe she look lek she ain' nuver gwine ly'arn nuttin', an' I'se kinder skeered ter lef' em heah wid her, 'ka'se she cyarn' cook, an' I better lef' her whar she at, down dar at Mis' Jones's. I 'clar' I don' know whut I gwine do," said the overburdened John as he looked appealingly at Elvira.

"I tell yo' whut ter do wid 'em."

"Whut?" he hopefully asked.

"Gin 'em erway."

"G'way fum heah, gal! yo' mus' think I'se dat 'er houn'. Gin dem chillun 'way, an' dey ain' got no mammy needer? Hi, gal, yo' mus' ain' got no feelin', ter stan' dar an' tell me ter gin my chillun erway. Yo' mus' be 'stracted. Nor, sehree, dat I ain' gwine gin 'em nowhar. Dey gwine stay whar dey is, an' yo' heah dat, don' yo'. I gwine see if Mis' Morton won' let Mary cum an' tek keer on 'em."

Supper finished, the children were soon asleep; in fact, the baby John went to sleep while eating his. When the dishes were washed and put away, Elvira put on her slat bonnet, threw a shawl over her shoulders, and came up to the fire to warm herself before going out.

"Hi, whar yo' gwine, Viry?"

"I gwine back whar I cum fum, dar whar I gwine."

"Ain' yo' gwine ter cum in de mornin' an' git bre'kfus' fer me?"

"Nuh." was the reply.

"Huccom'?"

"'Ka'se yo' don' wan' me."

"Yass I dus, I sho' dus. Dat's so. Huccom' yo' don' stay all night? Dar de new baid ain' nuver been tetched. Yo' kin sleep in dar, an' me on de flo'."

"I ain' er gwine do nay sich er thing, 'ka'se fus thing yo' know ev'ybody be talkin' 'bout me, an' dat I ain' nuver gwine ter stan'," replied Elvira. "My name"—and here she drew herself up to her full height—"is all I is got, Gawd knows; an' ef enybody gits ter prodjikin' wid dat—. Lemme tell yo' right heah, man, I ain't dat kin'. Yo' un'erstan'? Ef dat de kin' er 'ooman yo' arter I wish yo' good evenin,'" and with these words she flung wide the door and strode out of doors in high dudgeon, or a well-acted pretense, anyway.

She walked rapidly to her place of employment alone. Nor did she pause to hear the excuse that John volubly poured out after seeing the furor that his innocent suggestion had aroused.

"Dat 'ooman sho' is er big fool. Wonder dus she spec' I gwine fool 'long her an' let her cut dem capers 'round me 'dout me doin' nuttin'. Ef she dus, she gwine git fooled. I ain' gwine let no 'ooman run o' me, an' she ain' gwine do 't needer.

"Er 'ooman," he soliloquized, "is jes lek er mule. Dey jes' as contra'y es one 'nur', an' jes' es stubbin;

an' ef yo' wan' 'em to go dis er way, dey wan' go dat, an' dar 'tis. Ef yo' dun had er mule fer years an' years, an' yo' jes' es sho' yo' know dat mule better'n she know herse'f, yo' gwine ter git fooled. 'Ka'se dat mule jes' waitin' fer er chance, an' den she gwine ter wait ontwel de gear bre'k sumwhar 'bout her heels, an' when yo' git down dar ter men' it she gwine ter mek out lek she don' know who 'tis; an' den she gwine ter roach back her years an' switch her tail, an' den yo' better git er way 'fo' she gwine kill yo'.

"Ef she don' do that, she mek out lek she don' know whut er ole stump is by de road ef she dun bin by dar er millun times befo'. She ain' skeered er nuttin', she jes' got de debble in her. Er 'ooman 's jes lek dat. Ain' I bin knowin' er dat gal all her lifetime, an' jes' 'ka'se I ax her ter stay all night she dun got so mad long er me dat 'tain while ter say nuttin' ter her. I ain' stud'in' 'bout dat gal."

John's actions belied his words, for he kept thinking of the woman who had refused the shelter of his cabin, and for hours he lay awake, a most unusual thing for him to do. He remembered the uniform kindness of Elvira to both himself and children; her unstinted labor to secure them comfort in their new quarters; and most of all, her attention to the remains of his dead wife. However, he had not noticed that her eyes were among the few dry ones at the funeral. At last, tired out and grief-worn, he slept.

John appeared at Mrs. Morton's the following day to ask that Mary be permitted to return and keep house for him, which request she readily agreed to; and Mary, much against her will, returned to her father's house, and to the humdrum care of the children and the innumerable cares that try the souls of women.

"John, now you have taken Mary away, you must find me a good cook, right straight," commanded Mrs. Morton.

"Yass, 'm, dat I will."

A few days later, John in passing the house saw Elvira in the yard picking up chips, and was about to pass on without speaking to her, when she, already conscious of his presence, looked up, feigning astonishment at seeing him, and said:

"Hi, John, whut marter 'd yo'; didn' yo' seed me?"

"Yass, I seed yo'—yo' bigger 'nuff ter see."

"Huccom' yo' didn' spoke, den?"

"Ka'se I thought yo' wus mad."

"I ain' mad. Who said I wus mad? Mad 'bout whut?"

"I say yo' wus mad. Don' yo' look might'ly lek yo' wus mad tur'r night when I lars' seen yo'."

"G'way, man; I don' b'lieve dat nappy haid of your'n gwine uver ly'arn no sense. Whut I gwine git mad 'bout?"

"Dat's jes' whut gits 'way wid me. I ain' seed nuttin' ter git mad 'bout, but I 'spec' yo' did. Huccom' yo' dun me lek dat?"

"Lek whut?"

"Heah, yo' know jes' es well es I dus whut I talkin' 'bout."

"Dat so, yo' talkin' 'bout huccom' I lef' yo' tur'r night. Waal, I ain' gwine ter sleep in a ha'nted house fer yo' nur nobody else. Yo' heah dat' don' yo'."

"Who say dat house ha'nted?"

"Nummin' who say so. Hit ha'nted, an' dat's all I got ter say."

Finding it useless to dispute the point longer, John changed the subject, and the talk would have continued had not Mrs. Morton come to the door to remind Elvira that it was time to put supper on. John, somewhat confused at the sudden appearance of Mrs. Morton, started off, just as if he had been passing through the yard, but recovered in time to say:

"Good evenin', Mis' Marg'ret, I seed yo' dun foun'

er cook er r'ady;" and then added, before Elvira was out of hearing, "Yass, marm, I see yo' is, an' Viry sho' is er mighty good cook, but she jes' es sassy."

Elvira gave him a reproving glance over her shoulder as she entered the kitchen and began about supper.

"Yes, I got Elvira to come and live with me, but she told me that she might not stay long. I am sure I don't know why, because I always treat my people well; and when they leave they usually do so of their own accord," said Mrs. Morton.

"Dat's de truf, but she dunno nur nobody dunno, whut dat gal gwine do no mo' dan dey know whar er bolt er lightnin' gwine strek. But I gwine ter do whut I kin ter keep her fum lefin' yo' I sho' is."

"John, how do you like where you live; and are you and the children warm enough these cold nights?"

"I leks it right smart, but I leks de ole place bes'; and as ter de chillun, dey jes' es snug es er bug in er rug. Dey don' know de winter heah, 'cep' when dey go outdoors."

As John passed on to his humble home he stole a passing glance into the kitchen window, but saw no Elvira, and seeming to think it one of that individual's plans to provoke him, he determined not to permit it to do so.

Mrs. Morton paused a moment longer at the door to watch the changing beauty of a glorious sunset. The sun a moment before had sunk beneath a horizon that resembled most the bluish purple of the ocean wall. The hills to the east had been shorn of their gilded beauty. The river sparkled along its course, but it too is fading to the color of polished steel as it wends its silent way beneath the leafless and arching willows to join its mighty parent, the ocean. Except the dark verdant-green of the long lane of cedars, there is very little color to break the monotony of the landscape. All the ex-

panse is a dull gray—so much more so, apparently, when compared with the gorgeous colors of the western sky. Look! There Nature has lavished her most splendid colors in an indescribable sunset.

For a thousand miles over the vault of heaven the gorgeous splendor of that coloring, which momentarily changes, presents such a dazzling effect that it appals the beholder, and leads him to a deeper reverence for its Creator. Tier upon tier of fluffy clouds lie massed upon each other in great mountain-like heaps that reach almost to the zenith. Overhead filmy, delicate clouds daintily float in the azure blue of the zenith, like thousands upon thousands of miniature merchantmen, while a strata of clouds about the western horizon follow the sun to his sleep, as if eager for more than their share of the abundant gold so lavishly strewn about.

The heavens are lit up first in a magnificent flood of gold, that is partially reflected to earth, again gilding the hills in splendor, and causing the river to look like molten gold. Before the beauty of one color can be described, the glow becomes a rich orange, that merges imperceptibly into a red that is brilliant, dazzling, superb. It, too, quickly changes, and the next and next, until, like the lights in a grand cathedral being extinguished one by one, the curtain of day in all its magnificent beauty, which painters have tried in vain from time immemorial to re-produce, is closed. The purplish hue of twilight prevails, and the day is done.

Owing, we shall presume, to the fact that Elvira was engaged as Mrs. Morton's cook, it was a relief to the mind of John to make it convenient, however much it was out of his way to do so, to pass through Mr. Morton's yard, and there to meet in perpetual disagreement upon every subject that they were capable of discussing—always seemingly accidental on the part of Elvira, who timed the period of her exit from the kitchen, or her appearance at the door

thereof, so as to be synchronous with the appearance of John.

Had Elvira known, absolutely, the outcome of an argument, she would have maintained with the utmost vehemence against John's positive or negative, to that individual's everlasting annoyance. If he brought home an interesting piece of news a colloquy something after this fashion would ensue:

"'Viry, whut yo' reckon?"

"I reckon yo' is er fool, dat whut I reckon."

Paying no attention to her estimate of him, John would continue:

"Whut yo' reckon I hyeard tur'r day?"

"Yo' hyeard er lie, 'ka'se 'tain' so."

"How yo' know dat 'tain' so?"

"'Ka'se yo' nuver dus tell enythin' but er pack er lies."

"G'way, gal; now yo' know dat ain' so."

"Den I'se er lie den?"

"Nuh, I didn' call yo' no lie."

"Whut hit den?"

"I 'spote yo', dats all."

"Ain' dat jes' de same es callin' me er lier?"

"Co'se 'tain'."

"Yass, dat whut yo' say."

"I gwine ter lef' it to Mrs. Morton dat 'tain'."

To this Elvira would promptly agree, for she thought Mrs. Morton entirely suitable as an arbitrator; and besides, her curiosity was becoming whetted with the long delay in telling the news which John had forgotten.

"Hi, man, whut dat yo' gwine ter tell me so fas'?"

"Dat's er fac'. I 'clar' I dun' fergit all 'bout whut I gwine tel yo'."

"He, he," laughs Elvira.

"Dat so. Heah 'hit," and then he would proceed to tell the incident to which he had referred, as if speaking of a basket or something else he had lost and found again. Elvira would promptly dispute the truth of it, which would set going another fer-

vent discussion, terminating just without the bounds of a quarrel.

Their frequent casual meetings and prolonged discussions of matters of the least importance; the invitations, on the part of Elvira, to John to have some dainty morsel, which had been prepared by her own hands, for she ventured as far as this now, soon culminated in that, especially on the part of John, about which so many books have been written, so many blushes have been blushed, so many tears have been shed, and for which so many good men and women have died. There, everybody has guessed the riddle.

Yes, John had begun to love Elvira; but being as bashful as a boy, he found it well-nigh impossible to make the fact known to the one whom, above all others upon the face of the earth, he was most anxious to acquaint with the fact.

"Dat gal is so pizenous mean dat ef I go an' sorter let loose ter her, she jes' gwine tell ev'ybody cum erlong: 'Dat fool John Brooks cum foolin' long er me, axin' er me ter maa'y him, an' whut he got I gwine maa'y him fer? Dar he hardly got er shu't ter his back. He mus' ain' got good sense.' But dat ain' keep me fum thinkin' er heap er dat gal.

"Shucks! I jes' up an' tol' po' Polly ter le's git ma'ied, jes' lek eetin' er bre'kfus', but dat ain' gwine do fer dis gal. She ain' one er dem e'zy gals dat gwine let yo' twis' em roun' yo' finger."

"Huh, eh!" said John to himself as he left the kitchen window at Mrs. Morton's a chilly night in the following October, after parleying nonsense with Elvira while he consumed an enormous plate of "pluck and truck," which is farm parlance for a stew made of the lights, or lungs, and the livers of hogs; a quantity of bread, and several cups of coffee. He was therefore in prime condition to permit his thoughts to dwell upon her who knew so well how to reach the hearts of good livers, and that is by the pregnable stomach.

"Dat so, Sis' Viry. Whut yo' gwine do de secun' Sunday in dis munt'?" asked John as he returned and poked his head in the open window.

"Hi, nigger, whut yo' cum 'Sis' Viry' me fer. I ain' none er yo' sister."

"Don' I know dat jes' es well es yo'. But we's bre'r's an' sisters in de Lawd, ain' us?"

"Dat so. I ain' gwine do nuttin' 'cep cook, dat whut I gwine do. Huccom'?"

"Ka'se."

"Ka'se killed de cat."

"Ka'se I wan' ax yo' ter les go ter church nex' secun' Sunday."

"Waal," was the brief reply, which so struck John with surprise that he for a moment lost his self-control, for he fully expected a long and tedious argument before Elvira would consent to go. He had doubts as to whether he would be able to get her consent to accompany him, even then.

It is not saying too much when we describe Elvira's spirits as joyous, for she had just heard that invitation from John which she had long looked for, and, but for the bashfulness of her suitor, would have been offered and accepted long ago. So surprised had she been at his offer that she forgot to taunt him, much as she loved to banter; and for once permitted him to pass in peace. For almost a year Elvira had had to bear the burden through this courtship, for immediately John came within the gaze of her grayish brown eyes he apparently lost his will and seemed bewitched, and some of his neighbors ventured openly to say as much. Therefore it was not surprising that Elvira felt exalted in winning thus far her purpose.

We shall doubt, of course, that any real love existed in her bosom for John, and so far we have very good reasons for believing that Elvira sought, in her encouragement of John, a means of securing a home without a deal of trouble. But as for loving the man to whom she hoped to be wedded, it had not oc-

curred to her that it was at all necessary. She had been among the first to hear of John being a land-holder in his own right, and she could not forbear a feeling of bitter envy, on hearing the news. So when she heard of the fire and the fatal result to the wife of John, she did not restrain a feeling of self-congratulation, which she, in her perfect control, forbade the exposure of, and had thus deceived those even who knew her best. Then and there, before she had ever seen the lifeless body of the victim of the fire, she had resolved to be the next wife of John.

By the will of this woman John had been entangled, and now he was gradually but surely being brought to a state of existence calculated to destroy his peace of mind. Systematic had been her conquest, and when she went to her room that night it was with the consciousness that her plans had been well formed and their execution masterful. This probably accounted for her undisturbed rest.

The Sunday following being the second one of the month, it had been announced at Antioch church that services would be held on this particular Sunday by an itinerant preacher who preached alternately at four other churches, and during the week worked his farm, upon which he depended chiefly for his livelihood.

The distance to the church from John's home was about three miles; and on this occasion John, who, by the way, had long since had a comfortable log-house put up on the site of his old home, and which he occupied, had arisen early, and fed and curried Dolly, his mule, with such painstaking care that she must have wondered, as she rolled the "nubbins" about in her trough, what could have induced her master to devote such a length of time upon her this morning, for usually he barely touched her.

After breakfast Dolly was hitched to the wagon and Punch told to get in, and off they drove to the

branch, Joe and the other children following, curious to know what their father was going to do.

Stopping half way across the branch, John got out and commenced washing the wagon, which was a proceeding unheard of by the children, for the only time they had ever known the wagon to be in water was when the wheels had been soaked in the pond to keep the tires on.

"Cum heah, gal," whut yo' stanin' dar fer? Wash dat wheel off over dar."

Joe gingerly obeyed, because the water was cold and her feet bare.

The curiosity of Punch could be restrained no longer, and he asked:

"Daddy, whut yo' gittin' de mud off'n de wagon fer?"

"Jes' 'ka'se I'se gwine ter church."

"Huccom' yo' ain' bin gittin' 't off ev'y time?"

"Hesh, boy; yo' ax' too many questions."

The wagon washed, the children were given a return ride to the house, where John soon dressed himself in the only white shirt that he possessed. He wore his workaday shoes and a new home-made suit of jeans, which did not in the least fit him, and with a cheap hat to top off, he completed his toilet. Then, mounting the wagon seat, this time alone, he drove off, leaving the rebellious Susan and John raising their voices in cries of disappointment. They were finally appeased by Mary saying to them, "Daddy gwine bring back er heap er purty things."

John urged Dolly into a brisk trot just as he entered the yard at Mr. Morton's, for the effect it would probably have on Elvira, who had been gazing for the last half hour, with brief interruptions, down the road whence he was to come, and so had become most impatient.

"Wey, wey, Dolly; wey gal, her-r-rp! Wey, mule; whut de debble marter 'd yo'?" said John as he strenuously pulled on the cord lines; and Dolly,

after repeated injunctions and hard pulls, was brought to a stop.

Elvira had been ready long since, and as she appeared at the door, rigged out in her Sunday best, John was mute with delight. He dismounted, helped her to get in the wagon, got in himself, and giving a resounding lash to Dolly, off they went.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELVIRA'S TRIUMPH.

John found his tongue soon after arriving in the big road, and Dolly, having forgotten the lashing she had but so recently received, lapsed again into a moping walk and continued thus, except when the conversation lagged. Then John would administer a few cuts with the hickory switch, and she would be again urged to a trot that would cease promptly just as soon as the talk became absorbing, for to all outward appearances Dolly seemed concerned for her master's good.

The church was reached after fully an hour spent on the way, and without any evidence of disruption between the two beyond their having disagreed upon every subject talked of. Since they had been doing this for almost a year now, no animosity yet existed between them. Instead, however, there did exist on the part of John a burning desire to possess Elvira, and on her part a greater desire not to possess John so much, but rather to be an equal partner with him in his worldly goods, which seemed extensive enough in her eyes.

In due time John drove into the church-yard. This, we regret to say, had been chosen by the members of the church, not because of its beauty of location, but because the ground upon which it was built was too poor to be of any other use. It was aptly described by the quaint remark of an irreverent negro, who said, "Dat lan' ain' fittin' fer nutting' but ter hol' er house." So, in a setting of broom straw and sassafras undergrowth, the oblong log church had been built.

A number of young men came up to the wagon as John drove up, to aid in assisting Elvira to alight from the wagon. There was a general handshaking, the asking after each other's health, and then one of the young men assumed the office of escort to Elvira until she reached the church door, when she found a seat for herself among the women on the left-hand side of the church. Her escort then returned to talk to his companions that he had just left. John unhitched Dolly's traces and tied her to the limb of a scrubby oak, just as if she intended running away, the probability of which was very unlikely.

The singing now began, the signal for all the laggard men and boys to enter the church, which they promptly obeyed, and streamed in in single file, seating themselves on the right side of the room.

There was no organ, and the hymn was read line by line, and sung as read, some good voice leading. Then followed a prayer, probably a half hour long, followed by singing; then the sermon proper of a generous hour and a half in length, which sent all the children into a sound sleep, and most of their elders to nodding, while the preacher continued uninterruptedly to the end of his discourse, ignoring the sonorous sounds proceeding from various quarters of the room, to which he seemed entirely oblivious. So absorbed had he become in his sermon that it is doubtful if he would have been aware had his congregation left one by one.

All things mundane have an end, and so by and by the sermon ended, and was followed by another very long prayer and more singing.

The day was declining when John and Elvira, again seated in the wagon, began the tedium of their journey of a few miles. For want of something to say, John kept Dolly in almost a constant trot for nearly half a mile, and the mule looked back occasionally, as if in anticipation that the talk would soon begin. Elvira, already disappointed that John had not mentioned the subject uppermost in her

mind, and provoked with him for his tardiness and want of valor, was in an ill humor, and felt exasperated with the preacher, and could have strangled him without a twinge of her conscience for keeping her shut up there all those hours which she might have been using to better advantage in talking to John. She had hardly held her head up since she left the church, nor scarcely spoken, well knowing that her silence would produce some effect upon John, and she wondered what it would be.

Presently John, incapable of longer enduring the silence of Elvira, said, as Dolly lapsed into a walk:

"Hi, 'Viry, whut marter 'd yo'. Is yo' seekin'?"

"Seekin', whut I gwine seek?"

"Ligion, gal; 'ligion."

"Look er heah, man, I dun lis'n ter dat ole fool talk er r'ady twel I cyarn' keep my eyes open, an' I ain' gwine lis'n ter yo'—shet up. Now, mek dis mule er yourn git er long home. Heah hit's mos' time ter put on supper, an' heah me way out heah in de woods."

"Dus yo' wan' t' git home fas' as dat, 'Viry?" gently asked John, endeavoring to see Elvira's face, which was turned from him.

Dolly was hardly moving now, and she too seemed absorbed in the events that were happening.

"Yass, I wan' git home; 'co'se I dus. Whut yo' ax' dat fer?" said Elvira, her voice less harsh.

"Viry, whut mek yo' treat me lek dis? Don' yo' see I jes' pinin' way 'ka'se I love yo' so? I feel jes' lek I'se erfyer when I see yo', an' cole chills an' hot fevers keep er chasin' one 'nur'r back'uds an' for'ads all o' me, twel I feel lek I gwine fruz, er bun' up, I dunno which. Viry, look how lonesome I is, an' den think 'bout all my li'l' chillun, how happy dey gwine be ef yo' gimme de wu'd dat yo' will be dey tur'r mammy."

"G'way, man! Whut I gwine do long yo' an' all dem chillun, I jes' lek ter know?" Elvira spoke more

gently now, and the irritated tone had disappeared from her voice.

"Say yass, gal; say yass!" passionately exclaimed John, who, breaking through all restraint and forgetting his former shyness, now that his tongue had free rein, seized Elvira in his strong arms and began to kiss her as a furious rate. Elvira made some pretense of freeing herself from his caresses, but John continued his kisses uninterruptedly in spite of her struggles. Elvira made no answer, but her eyes dropped before the passionate gaze of her lover, and she hid her face on his bosom. John, oblivious to everything for the time being, so absorbed was he in the most delightful of all earthly occupations, presently awakened to the fact that he was not moving, nor was the wagon, nor Dolly, for she had taken advantage of the laxity of discipline and had stopped by the roadside to eat a morsel or two of grass, when her meal was rudely broken up by being hauled to by her master on the verge of a precipitous gully, with: "Wey, Dolly; wey! Whar in de name er de ole Scratch yo' gwine. Yo' li'l mo' an' brek we all naiks. G'up heah!"

Dolly switched her shaved tail irritably, and set out in a brisk trot homeward, as if conscious that her stopping had contributed toward the favorable outcome of her master's wooing. When the pair arrived at home, they were greeted with ecstasy by the children, who danced about the wagon and begged for a ride. Elvira was taken to Mrs. Morton's and she cooked the supper as usual; but Mrs. Morton thought her more cheerful, and she went about her work with more energy and vim than hitherto. She might not have noticed it, but it was so, that when John passed by the kitchen that night Elvira did not tease him, but instead watched him until he was out of sight.

Again the rich harvest of golden corn had been gathered, and John's part of the crop was a generous one. His tobacco, too, had been a success, so now

he felt himself at liberty to again marry. A respectable time had elapsed since the death of Polly, and, to use his expression, it "sho' wus lonesome" without a wife, for John was a lover of home, as well as of any woman he elevated to the degree of asking her to marry him.

John's nature was open, frank, and manly, and his manners commanded respect, which, because he was worthy of it, was accorded by all who knew him. Any merchant in the neighborhood would have allowed him almost unlimited credit, for they well knew him to be of sterling worth, and that if he once gave his word to pay it would be far more certainly forthcoming than the binding papers of some of his paler neighbors.

But the negro, once deceived by falsehood or treachery, was as unforgiving as an Indian, nor did he forget a service rendered him. He bestowed absolute trust in those whom he thought worthy, just as any one might repose his trust in him. Nor did he for a moment believe that such a one could have the heart to violate his trust.

A negro delights in a secret, and so inviolable had John's been kept, that not even his eldest child knew that he was to be married. Elvira, too, had been just as discreet. But Mrs. Morton had long since noticed the changed manner of Elvira toward John, and, suspecting the truth, mentioned it to her husband, who said:

"What, John? Why he has no more idea of marrying that vixen of an Elvira than he has of visiting the moon. Why do you think so?"

"Why? Because he used to come through the yard very often, and he and Elvira would have long talks, that became more and more heated, until they usually closed with a mutual 'you's er fool.' One day I overheard John speak thus to Elvira, and I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself; but he pleaded as an excuse, after asking my pardon, that 'Viry jes es aggervatin' es Satan he'se'f.' But I

don't notice this now. Elvira has him visit her in the kitchen, and she no more resembles the shrew of a month ago than I do."

"They are often earnestly talking about something, but I never overhear them. Still, I must confess that I believe the conclusions I have reached to be true. Do ask John, Flournoy. I should dislike very much to lose Elvira as my cook, because she is so much neater and better than Mary in every way, with this one exception, and that is her most ungovernable temper. She looks so sometimes that I am almost afraid of her. When I reprove her for the most trivial fault, she lapses into a sullen silence that I dread more than a quarrel outright."

"Well, why don't you let her go, Margaret. You know my temper too well, for should she use abuse to you, I am afraid I would not be able to restrain myself, and I might do her some injury for which I should be sorry afterwards."

"Oh, no, no! She never speaks even disrespectfully to me: It is only the look—the desperate look —she has."

"Is that all. Well, I never fear the looks doing harm, excepting always the peculiar ones that you gave me in those delightful days a long time ago, which so bewitched me, my old sweetheart, that I am still charmed."

"Why, I shall kiss my old hero for such a charming speech if he will be good enough to stoop down," she replied brightly.

The disparity of height between the two caused this to be necessary.

"John, you rascal you!" said Mr. Morton, a day or two later, as he saw him about to enter the kitchen.

"Hi, whut I dun dun now Mis' Flo'noy?"

"You know very well what you have done."

"I 'clar' fo' Gawd I dunno whut yo' talkin' 'bout."

"When are you and Elvira going to be married?"

A look of surprised wonder overspread John's

features as he met the steady eyes of his questioner, and, confused, he muttered, with a grin:

"Who say I gwine git ma'ied?"

"I say so, because your actions tell me just as truly as ever you could have done otherwise."

"Dat's er fac', dat's er fac'; an' yo' sho' is er good fortune teller ef yo' know dat soon 'dout me sayin' er wu'd."

"No, I can't do all the things you think I can. But, surely, are you going to marry Elvira?"

"Yas, seh, dat whut she say."

"But how about you?"

"Waal, seh, ef I mus' I mus'; an' dat jes' whut I say too," said John as he shuffled his feet uneasily, seeming very much confused.

"But, John, do you think Elvira will make you a good wife; will she be kind to your children, and do you think she cares anything for you?"

"Yas, seh, dat I dus. I know she mighty fractious an' fyery sumtimes, but dat ain' nuttin'; she gwine cool down arter she have me."

"I doubt it, John; but I want to see you get on."

"Thankee, seh; an' I 'clar fergit ter tell yo' when yo' ax' me, but ef yo' think Mis' Margaret kin spyar Viry long er 'bout de middle er de Chris'mus, I thought dat would be er good time fer ole man Israel ter do de wu'k fer us."

"All right; I will speak to my wife for you, and see if she can arrange to find somebody to help her."

"Dat's all right 'bout dat, 'ka'se Mary jes' es anx'us fer ter git back es she kin be. 'Tain' while fer her ter boder 'bout nuttin'."

Finally Christmas time came, and the appointed time for the white-haired old Israel to do his "wuk."

The marriage was to take place at John's home, and soon after sunset his former quiet homestead was fairly alive with guests, for the marriage was given out to take place that night, which might mean any time between sunset and sunrise. Invitations had been scattered broadcast by those whom

John had chosen, and many were there who scarcely knew who was to be married, merely looking forward to the evening's pleasure of music and supper and the social intercourse of which the negro is so fond.

Everybody seemed bent on having a good time. There was already a house full, and many of the younger people found room in the yard, and the constant passing in and out of the house, the endless confusion, the constant increase of mingling voices made the scene one of restless life. The room below stairs had been cleared of beds and table, and only stools and chairs remained. The glow from the fire served to light this room, and as the heavy logs of oak and hickory replaced those consumed, they crackled and blazed up, lending additional life to the bustling scene.

The venerable old preacher had long since arrived, and sat in the cosiest seat by the fire, his feet sticking out on the rough clay hearth, warming himself. A young negro went up to him, gave him a paper, whispered something in his ear, and bounded rapidly up the creaking stairs. There was a sudden hush in the noisy crowd, and those outside were mysteriously told "heah dey cum," and then all tried to find a footing within doors. The bride has been dressed for the occasion these many hours, and she and her future husband have been seated, with a few devoted attendants, up stairs for ever so long, and gladly do they rejoice when the time comes for their release.

Slowly down the narrow stairway they came, the bride leading, seeming very much confused because of the concentrated gaze of the crowd present. John, if possible, looked even more so, and he was alternately grinning and looking serious, as if in doubt as to which was the most suitable expression to wear at a wedding. He manfully stepped to the side of Elvira, however, as she touched the floor, and taking

her by the hand led her up to the old preacher, who stood on one side of the room awaiting them.

There was no choir of good singers, no pealing church organ playing a famous wedding march, no beautiful little bridesmaids announcing the entry into the room of this bride and groom. Only a number of whispering voices, the shuffle of feet, or the jostling of a chair was heard, until the voice of the preacher began the wedding service.

How embarrassing to all concerned is a wedding without music. Everybody seems so awkward, so stiff, so formal without some sound to break the stillness that always precedes the ceremony.

The old preacher, without the formality of using a book, for he knew all the ceremonies by heart that he was ever called upon to perform, quickly married the pair.

John blundered miserably when he was called upon to answer the necessary questions, while Elvira answered as glibly as if she had been through the service a thousand times.

The ceremony over, friends of the pair eagerly shook hands with them, and the jollification became more merry. The old preacher presently departed, for his presence seemed to put some restraint upon the young people. Soon after he disappeared, the "plunk" of a banjo was heard proceeding from an obscure corner of the room, then the tinkling of a jew's-harp, accompanied by the sonorous French harp, skilfully played by a young man who had the wind capacity of Boreas himself.

The floor was soon swept clean of stools, benches, and chairs, except around the wall, where the spectators sat in the form of a hollow square.

The young men busied about, first in the house and then out "seekin'" partners. As fast as room could be made for them in the house, all crowded in to see the opening dance. The tuning of the banjo completed, the player began to call the figures and as the half dozen couples assumed their places in the

dance, the music began, and the dancers were soon stepping to the lively air of "Billy in the Low-grounds," which was repeated until the ear wearied of ever hearing it again. The players knew nothing of musical notation, and they made numerous blunders in playing even so simple an air, but they cared nothing whatever for that, and so the dance continued. One piece after another was played, and still the dancers seem no more fatigued than when they first began, though perspiration was standing in great beads and streaming in little rivulets down their faces. The roaring hot fire, the dust, and the fumes from a smoking lamp, that had been borrowed for the occasion, along with the odor of villainous cologne and musk, made the air almost intolerable. The floor was now bobbing up and down under the increased weight, that made even the lamp flame flicker. The music ceased for a while and the over-heated went out into the cold air, but very soon returned with renewed energy and vigor whenever the music began.

The dancing capacity of some negroes seems unlimited, and many have been known to dance well nigh through the Christmas holidays, which usually embrace a week. Dancing every night for a week from dusk, almost, until dawn—think of it!

The wedding feast was served toward midnight, and was eaten by the guests standing, each in turn going up to a table loaded with good things and returning with whatever spoil he may have secured, which he gave to his partner, if he happened to have one, or ate himself. Good cheer prevailed and nobody thought of provoking a quarrel.

Enormous quantities of persimmon beer was consumed, it being brought in the family water bucket, and drunk like water from the gourd dipper. Then a great bucket of egg-nog was brought and the drinking continued until both men and women became hilarious and demanded music. Accordingly the music struck up, the table and its spread magic-

ally disappeared, and the dancing was renewed, and continued late into the night.

The children, satisfied with food and excited and afraid, crept into corners unnoticed, or up-stairs to sleep. Gradually the dancers became less in number, the musicians played themselves out, and dancing ceased altogether. Some of the guests departed, yet many remained and dozed seated in chairs, or lost consciousness lying prone on the dusty floor until morning.

So was Elvira possessed of her desire.

"Now, I gwine see who's who heah now," she said to herself as she composed herself for a brief nap before the day dawned. "John dun fool 'long me er nuff ter wyar de patience er Job ter er frazzle. I dun got whut I went arter now, an' I gwine let him know 'bout hit ef he git ter cuttin' up roun' me, an' dat's er fac'."

With this proud thought she slept profoundly until awakened by the crying of baby John, who was mightily disturbed because he could not have his full quota of bread on the spot. Looking about her she found the guests gone and her husband out of the house and going to the crying child she harshly cried:

"Shet up, yo' li'l' debble yo', an' stop dat fuss."

All the other children stole away from her, and John looked up with a scared face at his step-mother, ceased crying a moment, took a full breath, and began again, in earnest this time.

"Didn' I tol' yo' ter shet up dat fus!" snapped Elvira as she caught hold of the child and gave him a shake. This means failing, she administered several sound slaps, gave him a scrap of bread and meat left over from the night before, again admonished him, and with dire threats of skinning him alive if he so much as whimpered again, tried to have her sleep out in the loft above. However, noise made by the children, who were constantly having some intestine strife, forbade it, and being at last hopelessly

awake, she dressed herself, first taking great care to pack away the cheap finery worn the night before. By the time she arrived in the room below stairs she was certainly in no fit humor to be introduced to a number of impressionable children, for it is well known that childish likes and dislikes, are longest lived.

When the dirty, dismal children saw her coming down they scurried from her like guilty things, and all hid away as best they could, with the exception of John, who stood fast in the center of the floor, and appeared as if prepared to endure the worst punishment his enemy could inflict. He was scared, but had long ago ceased crying, and was intently eyeing his step-mother, and watching her movements, as if wondering what her intentions were.

The fire had gone out, and had not yet been made up; the floor was covered with dried mud, and everything about the room was dusty, cold and bleak, and the hands and feet of little John were aching with cold, which he could not understand, but this time he did not cry.

“Yo’ Joe, yo’ lazy wench, whyn’t yo’ git up fum dar an’ mek er fyer! Punch, git off’n dat pallet an’ go ter de spring ‘fo’ yo’ pa cum, or I lay he gwine tyar ev’ y bit er skin off’n yo!”

Joe crept slowly from the scant covering on the pallet beside Punch, where they both had sought concealment from those searching eyes upon her entrance, and scratching about in the ashes managed after much exertion to find a live coal as large as a walnut, which she assiduously tried to keep alive by constantly blowing until some dry wood was secured and piled upon it. The blast continued meanwhile until the fire blazed up, wood was put on, and the room soon became warm.

By easy stages Susan came out of her hiding place when she thought nobody was looking, and crept up to the fire.

By the time Joe had the fire blazing, Punch managed to complete the daily work of pulling on the boots which he was the happy possessor of, for boots are very difficult things to get on, especially on cold mornings before the fire is made. This done, he took the bucket from the shelf outside the door, broke the thin ice, and tried his best to throw the water on old Nero, who deftly dodged it. With the gourd rattling in the bucket, the boy set out for the spring, where he partially filled it, and lifted it to his head, for he had already learned that he could carry it there without spilling his boots full at every step, which he had several times successfully done when he attempted to carry the bucket in his hand.

John presently came in the house, after an unusually long time at the stable, and finding no breakfast ready, said somewhat petulantly:

"Hi, Viry, hucom' bre'kfus' ain' r'ady? I dun bin gone er long time, an' heah hit er hour be-sun an' I ain' et yit."

"Hucom' bre'kfus' ain' r'ady? Yo' better ax yo' se'f dat. Whut yo' tek yo'se'f off 'dout mekin' er fyer fer? Dat's whut I wan' ter know? Yo' mus' think I'se er fool ef yo' think I gwine git up in de cole ter mek er fyer fer yo' chillun ter warm deyse'ves by, but I ain' I gwine ter say right heah, dat ef yo' wan' me ter git yo' vittles yo' got ter mek dem chillun 'ten' ter dey bizness. I ain' gwine punish myse'f in de cole fer nobody. Now yo' heah dat, 'don' yo'?"

"Hesh, 'Viry; whut marter 'long er yo'? Yo' sho' is e'sy fer ter fly off'n de han'le. I ain' said nuttin' fer ter mek yo' talk lek dat. Gawd knows I gwine do whut I kin ter please yo', an' dat's all enybody kin do."

Elvira said nothing in reply, but her face wore a sullen look, and she busied herself about the meal, and at last placed the palatable food on the table, washed her hands, and seated herself at the board, even before her husband had finished his ablutions,

to the wonder of the elder children, who had never seen such audacity before.

John had not yet observed his wife, but when he did he frowned, and was silent a moment before he spoke:

“Whut yo’ mean by dat, Viry?”

“Mean by whut?”

“Ain’ yo’ got ‘nuff manners ter know dat I allers eets fus’, an’ den de wimmin an’ chillun arterwu’ds?”

“Yass, I know dat whut yo’ bin useter; but I ain’, and I ain’ gwine be. I gwine eet when I please an’ whar’ I please, an’ I ain’ gwine let yo’ nur nobody play marster an’ mistiss wid me,” Elvira answered.

“Stop, ‘ooman l!” called John in a voice of thunder, his wrath rising which he found difficult to control.

Elvira was astounded. She dropped the tin spoon in the saucer and arose from the table without a word, and passed John on her way upstairs, looking him full in the eyes. She was gone an incredibly short time, but returned with her clothing tied in a bundle, and had dressed for going out of doors. John saw with dread the preparations for departure, and his grief was well depicted on his face, where so recently anger held sway.

Pride, even in this untutored negro, came very near overcoming his passionate love for Elvira, for not until she had made all her preparations for departure, had picked up her bundle, and was on the door step, did he yield. Then, in a voice broken with tears and bitter thoughts of having to part with her, he cried:

“Don’ leave me, Viry; don’ leave me! I ‘clar’ ‘fo’ Gawd I tek ev’ything back I say jes’ now! I know I dun wrong. Yo’ kin do jes’ es yo’ please. I’se yourn, de chillun yourn, an’ all I’se got yourn. Cum back, Viry!”

Elvira had not spoken. She hesitated a moment to see if John’s plea was earnest, then suddenly

turned on her heel, entered the cabin, deposited her bundle on the floor, gave a grunt of contempt, and resumed her seat at the table and proceeded to finish her meal.

How much better would it have been, in view of after events, had John not said "cum back."

CHAPTER IX.

PUNCH'S SCHOOL.

After the occurrences noted in the last chapter, John rarely ventured to offer any complaint about the manner in which his household affairs were conducted. Indeed, he had little cause for complaint as to the manner in which these affairs were administered, for it must be confessed that, owing to the good management of Elvira, everything about the house presented a delightfully clean and tidy appearance, with the exception of the children. Evidently, in the usual process of house cleaning, they were forgotten. John found his meals well prepared, and served in a much better manner than he had been accustomed to, for we already know Elvira to be a good cook. Since that memorable breakfast, Elvira had eaten her meals with her husband, and the children waited, instead of her. Both found it exceedingly difficult to train the ravenous baby John into the new order of things. It was indeed no easy matter for John the elder to enjoy his food while his children followed with wishful eyes every morsel that went into his mouth, but after awhile he became accustomed to it, and seemed to think it all right.

So immured to dirt had John become in the rough work on the farm, that he paid little attention to the children, who not only became exceedingly dirty, but before the cold weather had gone were in need of clothing and shoes; but the latter were not permissible, even had Elvira been so commiserative, for it was generally understood, as we have already noted, that a single pair of shoes, whatever their quality,

must suffice for the winter, or else the unlucky child must remain indoors or go barefoot.

Elvira made no effort to renew the worn-out clothing, nor even to do the patching, except for her husband; nor did she pretend to do the children's washing, which duties naturally devolved upon Joe, who, though a child, was urged, after a deal of scolding and thrashing upon Elvira's part, to do the washing and mending for herself, Punch, Susan and John. So clumsily were both done that many times had Elvira returned to the house, after several hours' absence, to give her a bitter scolding for not washing the dirty rags clean, and with a resounding slap on the cheek force her to collect every one of the already dried remnants of clothing and return them to the tub to be again washed before she was even permitted to rest. Or if a garment was patched by the unlucky girl and it did not conform to her standard of excellence, she caused its immediate removal, with, of course, another slap, although it had consumed a deal of time to do. While it may be true that both the washing and patching, perhaps, were badly done, the poor girl knew no better, and the unreasonable step-mother was too hot-tempered and impatient to show her. So one could not wonder that the child's life became embittered and she became sullen, morose, and given to outright idleness, or to lying to shield herself from punishment.

Upon Punch the duty of bringing water, minding the children, and providing wood, after the winter's supply had been exhausted, was imposed. After the winter was over the house-wife had to get the wood for cooking in the best way she could. Punch, scarcely eight years old, had received no dainty nursing to make him puny, and in consequence was strong, supple, and overgrown, and as cheerful and happy as a negro only could be, which cheerfulness did not desert him even when in the presence of Elvira.

This woman was especially repulsive to him, nor did he long remain where she was unless obliged to do so. So soon are negro children brought up to earning their own living, that this child, though hardly old enough to begin school, was cutting wood and bringing water, and when tall enough to hold a plow steady will be plowing maybe.

The days passed drearily enough for the boy while Don was at school, but when he returned home in the evening, Punch seemed delighted, and marked the time of his arrival by watching the sun, or rude guessing. He contrived either to have his work done, or escaping therefrom somehow, scampered joyfully off to join the one delightful companion of his childhood, and as they approached each other, ringing yodels sprang from their young throats in mutual greeting.

The daily intercourse that Punch enjoyed with Don was pathetic. Of course Punch knew nothing of school, and John had either forgotten to send him or was too careless to give it much thought. Elvira probably thought Punch too worthless even to buy books for, and then the school was so far away. So Punch remained at home, and found the greatest pleasure in talking with Don when he returned. No secrets are hidden when boys open their hearts to one another, and their candor and frankness toward each other is a constant lesson to their elders.

This was Don's first year at school, and when the session began Don was most eager to go. He was exceedingly proud when his father took him behind him on Zollikoffer to introduce him to his teacher and the school. His spirits were buoyant and his hopes high as he rode along the pleasant road in the mellow October sun that was fast dyeing the woods in glowing colors. But when he was left at the dreary and dull school, with its ugly and petulant old master, the promise and delights of school life faded from his mind like a shadow, and he heartily wished himself at home with Punch.

Seated in the school, he saw from the window his father mount his horse and ride away, first turning in his saddle to wave a good-by with his hand. How his heart sank. What would he not have given to have been up behind him and returning, too? He would, in his childish mind, have given all he ever hoped to gain by his schooling—yes, a dozen times over.

His head sank on his desk, and he cried softly as if afraid of being seen. His teacher wisely let him cry so long as his tears held out, and scarcely noticed him all day. Before night arrived he had lost his timidity, and was already beginning to think school a delightful place. When the school was closed for the day, how bravely did he trudge home, his head full of wonderful experiences to relate to Punch and all at home.

But Punch—how had he borne this rude separation! Far differently, for there was no novelty to interrupt the tedium of his day, and as he went about his daily duties he had a feeling of desolation come over him; for while Don had been absent from him days together, he had never felt as then, for now he was going to school and that meant the daily separation, and then he would learn and they would always be separated, which he thought so hard to bear. After doing what he was bidden about the house, he wandered off by himself into the woods, and passed the day idly throwing at birds, and wandering aimlessly here and there, trying as best he might to consume the time until Don's return. He missed his dinner, but that was nothing, for he often did that. Any country boy of his age can find plenty in the fields to satisfy hunger for a longer time than this. When he arrived at home Elvira had been calling loudly for him, until she was hoarse, for the loud wails of the youthful John for Punch had first caused her to notice his absence several hours before, and even now he was fretting, and in spite of

her often-repeated threats and slaps, still cried for his brother.

"Whar' yo' bin, Punch?"

"I ain' bin nowhar'."

"Yo' ain' bin nowhar'? Whyn't yo' answer me den?"

"Ka'se I ain' heared yo'."

"Cum heah ter me, yo' li'l' lyin' debble yo!"

And with a spring like a wild beast she grasped the child's arm in her strong hand, almost crushing it, and dragged him forcibly with her over the yard to where she could break some substantial switches. She selected several, and, deaf to the piteous pleadings of Punch, who kept begging:

"Please, marm, don' whup me dis time; I didn' go ter do hit. I 'clar' I ain' gwine er step 'way fum heah 'dout axin' yo'. Please, marm, don' whup me; please, marm."

But prayers were useless. The vengeful blood of this woman was on fire, and slowly stripping the boy of his shirt, with a grin of fiendish delight, took both his hands in hers and held them so tightly that the boy cried out with pain.

"Yo' ain' cried yit. Jes' wait twel I gi' yo' sumin' fer ter cry 'long!" she said as her glittering teeth came together with a resounding snap and ground with a grating noise. Her hand was raised with the cruel rods, and in another instant fell on the child's back, leaving great whelps on his quivering body. Another lash, another, and then they came in a stinging volley that seemed to the child to tear the flesh like fire, and in vain he screamed for mercy as his brutal torturer continued whipping. Finally, when blood ran down his back and the switches were worn to stumps in her hand, she flung him from her in anger, following him with the remains of the bunch of rods.

Punch, writhing with pain, and great drops of cold sweat standing on his brow, seemed on fire with indignation at such treatment. He gasped as the

whipping ended, and gave a look—oh that frightful look! even in a child not to be forgotten. She had thrashed him as he would not have dared treat any living thing. He staggered toward the fence for support, missed it, and fell exhausted in a corner. There Elvira watched him until he partially recovered, and then quietly disappeared. Joe presently came out, and with eyes streaming with pity for him, which she was careful to hide from Elvira, she assisted in replacing his clothing, the while trying to console him by saying:

"Nummin', Punch, yo' jes' don' do lek dat no mo', an' when yo' git big ernuff I wouldn' let her lay her han's on me."

During Punch's chastisement, John had looked on, first with amazement, then with horror, and he even ventured to attempt, in his childish way, the rescue of his brother, but a lash or two on his bare legs sent him howling into the arms of his sister Joe, and the two younger children scurried away to avoid seeing Punch's punishment.

There was no cheerful greeting between the two boys as they met after Don's arrival from school. Immediately Punch failed to respond to the accustomed call, Don knew something was wrong, and hastened forward to meet him, for he noticed that he shuffled along slowly, as if his black legs had lost their usual agility, which surprised him.

"What's the matter, Punch?"

"Tain' nuttin'."

"Yes it is. What's your shirt doing bloody?" asked Don as he noticed his shirt mottled with blood.

"Dat's jes' whar I got hu't jes' now."

"How? It's no such thing. Why, your shirt is soaked with blood, boy! Lemme see." Here Don, exposing the bleeding back of Punch, was horrified with the sight, and asked in an angry voice, "Who did that?"

"Dat ar' 'ooman over dar."

"Who—Elvira?"

Punch nodded assent, and Don felt such a thirst for vengeance that he could scarce contain himself. Had not Punch prevented, he would have gone and told John instantly.

"Don, I wan' yo' ter promise me sumin'."

"What is it, Punch?"

"Don' tell nobody 'bout dis whuppin', an' den go ter de house an' git one er yo' ole shu'ts an' bring hit down yonder by de washin' hole in de branch, an' I gwine wait fer you'."

"Yes, I will."

Saying this, Don bounded up the hill like a hare; sought and found a garment the age of which probably coincided with Punch's wishes, and got clear of the house without being asked any inconvenient questions.

Punch awaited him at the promised rendezvous, and rapidly removing the bloody shirt, bathed himself in the chilly water and put on the clean one.

After he had finished his ablutions and his toilet, his old-time cheerfulness seemed to return, much to the wonder of Don, who was amazed at the apparent indifference of Punch to such a violent thrashing.

"Punch, I don't see how you can stand being whipped like that and not tell your father."

"Humph! yo' seed me git outer dis shu't, didn' yo', an' yo' know huccom'?"

"No; why? Unless to put on a clean one."

"Dat ain' hit. I know jes' es well ef daddy fin' dat shu't on me, he sho' know dat 'ooman dun whup me, an' I skeered he mout gimme ernur'."

"He must be as brutal as she is, then."

"Nor he ain'; but he thinks ev'ything she do is zackly right, an' 'tain' no use fer nobody ter say nuttin', 'ka'se 'tain' gwine do no good. I gwine ter mek Joe wash dis fer me, an' daddy ain' gwine know nuttin'," said Punch, smiling at the thought of how he would deceive his father.

Don, however, was so grieved at the shameful

treatment of Punch that he could not readily dismiss it from his mind. He was thoughtful for a long time, it seemed to Punch, who was looking at him, waiting to hear what he had to say next. He noticed Don's fingers tighten into two double fists and his face grow very red. Finally he blurted out:

"I know what I would do if she ever whipped me like that again. I would, yes I would—"

"Whut dat?" interrupted Punch.

"If she ever whipped me like that, I never would forget. I would wait and wait until I was a man, and then—and then—I would come back from wherever I was just to choke her like a dog; to choke her until she begged me for mercy; and then choke her until she was dead, dead!"

Punch listened with admiration at this childish threat. His heart was already brimming full of rancor toward his step-mother, but he felt great relief in hearing his companion tell, in more eloquent language than his own, what he would do, which so accurately coincided with his own wishes that he could scarcely refrain from hugging him to his bosom and telling him how much he had unburdened his mind. Punch, however, was neither demonstrative nor emotional. He was not given to expressing himself in a speech of the length of Don's, but instead took his whipping philosophically. He was thankful not to be killed outright, and felt his thanks to Don for so well saying what he would most like to do to Elvira. His only response was:

"Nummin', yo' jes' wait."

Forgetting the pain produced by his scarified back, he was eager to hear of Don's experience at school.

"Don, whut yo' gwine do at de school?"

"I am goin' to learn to read and write, and after awhile to cipher and learn a heap of things; and after I learn all I can learn in the school here, father

is going to send me away to school, because I heard him say so to mother."

"When dat gwine be?" asked Punch uneasily.

"Oh, that won't be for a long, long time. And maybe not at all," he added as he noticed the dejected tone in Punch's voice. He was glad when he heard the sigh of relief and saw the sad face enliven again.

"Don, I sho' dus wan' ter write lek white folks. I know niggers ain' got much sense, but hit sho' look lek I orter ly'arn dat much, 'ka'se daddy kin read a li'l bit."

Since Don had begun school, Punch had awakened to a knowledge that he was beginning to slip away from him, and he felt that in a few years he would be gone far beyond his reach unless he made some effort to keep pace with him. To have Don learn what he could not, made him more anxious and eager to learn than ever, not probably so much for the sake of the knowledge acquired, but because he was proud, and felt that it was unworthy in him to sit down supinely and let Don, who was by no means his physical equal, pass him on the road to learning. Punch was ambitious, and in his youthful mind had already set his heart upon several occupations that might prove for him an eventful, if not successful, career.

The negro school was too far away from Punch's home for him to attend, as we have already noted, and mixed schools were not to be thought of in that country; a law, by the way, that puzzled Punch to the utmost. So Punch, on the first day that Don spent at school, imparted his heart's desire to his friend and companion with the cherished hope that his fertile brain might find a means whereby his wishes might be gratified. Don, upon hearing Punch's expressed wish, thought a moment or two and then exclaimed:

"I've got it. I'll tell you what les' do!"

"Whut dat?" asked Punch laconically.

"You just wait, Punch, until I finish my reader, and then I will give it to you, and then I will learn you all that I know."

Since Don had not been taught grammar at school, the reader will pardon him a lapse because of the newness to him of the words used.

"Yo' gwine do dat sho' 'nuff? Say so ag'in so I kin heah hit right good. Dat's hit."

"Thankee, seh, Don!" exclaimed Punch hilariously dancing up and down with delight, and forgetful of the suffering of an hour or two before.

When Punch returned home, all evidence of the whipping had disappeared except the whelps, and they were hidden. Fearful lest his father notice his overclean shirt, he hastily got his jacket and put it on, and then proceeded to remove some of the shirt's inconvenient whiteness by going surreptitiously to the fireplace and transferring some of the soot to the bosom, so that all suspicion might be removed. He need not have put himself to so much trouble, because his father was too tired from his day's work to notice whether he had a shirt on at all or no. Elvira had not yet cooled toward him, therefore had nothing to say, and after she had finished her supper permitted him, along with the others, to have what remained, which we regret to say was scarcely enough to satisfy the inordinate appetites of these growing negro children. Nevertheless, Punch lay down on his hard pallet that night most delightfully happy, even if the day had been one of bitterness for him. He was assured of at least keeping within hearing distance of Don, and he declared to himself, as he lay awake thinking, even after the fire had died out:

"Yass, I gwine keep up wid him 'dout he fly, 'ka'se I sho' is de biggis' an' de stronges'; but maybe dat ain' whut yo' need when yo' gwine ly'arn how ter read an' write. Enyhow, I gwine show dat 'ooman sumin' one day er 'nur'r."

According to promise, Don, as soon as he had finished with his first book at school, took it to Punch. It had taken him a very little while to finish it, for his teacher did not foolishly restrain him to any class long, but permitted him to advance rapidly, as he had now arrived at that age best suited for children to begin school, and he was so very eager to learn. The negro child sat down by the side of Don in his father's house, and looked on with admiring eyes, and occasionally gave expression to characteristic words of approval as Don showed him how much he had learned at one time, and this at another, and this great long lesson at another, showing him through the book.

How strikingly like grown-up people children are. As soon as they learn something they are very sure that their neighbors do not know, or acquire some pretty bauble that they are positively certain nobody ever saw before, they must parade it for the benefit of the staring crowd.

Punch, being so unprepared for this introduction to the mysteries of learning, as soon as the book was opened by Don began to have misgivings that he could not keep up with him after all, and as he went deeper into the mysteries he felt his confidence slipping away, like Bob Acres's valor, and he was at last sure, indeed very sure, that strength and size had little to do with "ly'arnin' dem cuy'us li'l' figgers," meaning the letters. Though at first confusing and insurmountably difficult to the child, who could not in the least brook restraint, yet by grim determination and perseverance on his part, and unrelaxing patience on the part of Don, he learned his letters and then to spell short words. But it seemed an unending time from the period of learning his letters until he could lash his memory to so arrange the letters to spell words. More fantastic spelling was never dreamed of than that listened to by Don. Punch could recall that certain letters formed certain words, but the order in which they

were placed he could never master; nor has he learned to do so yet with entire and full confidence that they are marshalled in proper order.

With money of his own, Don bought Punch a slate and pencil, and after long and tedious labor its owner learned to make his letters. But how much easier it was to ride a horse, swim, or even plow; and it must be admitted that our hero much preferred any occupation with which he was acquainted to that of tediously poring over books.

One of the characteristics of Punch was his tenacity, for he had already won that distinction in the numerous bouts which he had with boys of the neighborhood, and many had learned from painful experience that if he once laid hold of his antagonist, either in wrestling embrace or in anger in personal conflict, he was as likely to let go as the highland terrapin, which, tradition says, "she let yo' go when hit thunders."

His father already knew of his being taught by Don, and was very proud of it, but Elvira was not; and while she bore what she called "triflin' 'way his time," Punch could readily see that she was exceedingly incensed whenever she saw him with his book or slate, which was very rare fortunately; but when she did she would mutter, half audibly:

"Whut de use er dat nappy-haid nigger tryin' ter ly'arn? All he fittin' ter ly'arn is how termek er ash-cake, 'ka'se he know how ter 'stroy hit now."

Punch, however, asked no advice, nor did he receive any of Elvira, for since that dreadful reprimand he very rarely spoke to her, nor did she to him, except to curtly order him about his business, which, boy-like, he frequently neglected; or else to harshly scold him for the most trivial faults.

At last it came to the point when as Punch grew older it seemed mutually understood between him and his step-mother that it was her province to command and his to obey, a failure of which duty on his part would lay him under the necessity of receiv-

ing a scourging, one of which would have served for a life-time. Therefore, unless his memory played him false, he was exemplary in obeying her, although his routine duties sometimes went neglected.

Intermingled with Punch's daily work on the farm was the soul-refreshing pleasure of playing with Don. It was Punch who first learned to swim in the muddy and malaria-breeding ice pond, the water of which teemed with tadpoles, young frogs, and slimy mud; but it felt so cool and soft compared to the heated water upon which the summer's sun poured in unrelenting fury. Then he taught Don, who found it quite as difficult to learn, as Punch had found his task.

Feats of jumping, running, and riding were constantly being practised by the fearless boy, to the admiration of Don, who aided and abetted whatever Punch essayed, with full confidence that if it could be done Punch could do it. Such an adept rider did he become, that one day Mr. Morton told him to go over to the clover lot and bridle Zollikoffer for him. Punch went, but he took no bridle; and soon coming up with the horse, he whistled softly and beguiled him into being caught by offering a bunch of clover, and when close enough he said, "Wey, Zolly, wey; dis me," and kindly catching the horse by the mane, managed to clamber upon his back. This was a signal for him to start, and off he went at a gallop, the boy guiding him by slapping him on either side of the neck. As he was riding past his father at work in the field, he stood upright on the horse, much to that good man's astonishment, who declared that: "Dat fool boy gwine bre'k he naik yit."

CHAPTER X.

THIS STORY COMES VERY NEAR ENDING.

The succeeding spring after Punch had begun his lessons brought our hero into actual daily labor on the farm, and as his father's helper he had to relinquish the minding of his small brother, which to him was by no means a difficult thing to do. So in his stead succeeded Susan, who was always forgetting her promotion and allowing her brother to care for himself or to get into mischief, which he had an unlimited capacity for doing.

During the dreary days of winter, when the rain soaked the ground until it became sodden, Punch, his father and Joe would go to the barn, where the fragrant, rich tobacco had been stowed, and labor through the long day, seated on some old chairs or benches, stripping the tobacco and tying it into bundles. When a rainy day came John would go to the barn, accompanied by Punch and his daughter, and, flinging wide the door, step into the cool interior, where the pervasive odor of the cured tobacco smelled like precious incense. Then, reaching up to where the tiers supported the sticks of tobacco, he would take down a stick carefully and feel it to see if it was in "order." If it was, a fire was built, and Punch was sent aloft like a mariner to hand down the sticks. The cured plants were removed, and the father then began to assort the several grades. Usually there were three, "lugs," "short," and "best," and the assorter usually stripped and tied up the best, and Punch, being the beginner, took the "lugs." He learned rapidly, and soon became a quick and adept hand.

Sometimes the number engaged in stripping would be augmented by the addition of "day labor," and then the gathering about the smouldering fire would be cheerful, and would enliven the dull hours by gossip, story telling, etc. So monotonous would the work become, that Punch would sometimes nod, and awaken with a start when his father called to him sharply.

Then when the day's work was done, and the day's stripping packed in "bulk" or hung on sticks, the boys, for Don had returned from school now, or probably the rain had prevented his going at all, would climb all over the barn, finding great delight in risking their necks in so doing, or by "skinning the cat" on the tiers, which occasioned many a bump, but the injured was too manly to cry out, and endured the pain with stoic patience.

The spring came, but before the leaves even began to appear there was talk of "plant-bed" burning, always delightful news to the boy on a farm where tobacco was cultivated. This yearly routine was as constantly a harbinger of spring as the return of the robins, and as the days became longer, even while the air was cold and frosty, the work began.

Preparatory to going to the woods Punch was called by his father to turn the grindstone, which he did with apparent reluctance, and as the heavy wheel went slowly round and round he wondered if his father would ever get through, for his back was almost broken. Presently he came to the conclusion that every pleasure in the world was marred by something disagreeable.

At last they reached the woods, and the echoing sounds of the axe as John and 'Chizedek began on a big tree, was as cheerful as the crackling of a good fire on a bleak winter night. There was a pause, a sharp, crackling, creaking noise, then a swish like a billow on the shore, and then a crash, a cheer followed, and the tree was down. Soon the men cut the logs into suitable lengths, split them, and piled

them in a cleared space by a stream, where the soil was rich with the fallen mould of a century or more. Then the wood was piled in a long row, which was to be the width of the "patch" or "bed," and the interstices between the logs filled with brush and lightwood, which it had been Punch's duty to aid in getting. When everything was in readiness the fire was lighted, and as the flames in their fury leaped up, making a great bonfire it was a sight that would please the city boy to distraction. As the wood burned it was replenished, until time to move the fire which was done by means of long hooks made of forked saplings, or old grubbing-hoes, and the men pulled the logs on an unburnt portion of ground, where it was burnt until every germ of insect and plant life was killed, and so on until the bed was long enough. The fire was then allowed to burn out, and the parched ground was swept clean with a broom of twigs, and the ground broken up with the grubbing-hoe preparatory to sowing the infinitesimal tobacco seed.

With each recurring spring both Punch and Don were seized with an ardent desire to possess in their own right miniature reproductions of their parents' crops, whether they be gardens, "plant patches," or tobacco grounds. So, just as soon as gardening operations were begun, there were claimants from almost every child for a garden, and the fence corners were accordingly awarded, one to each, and then the gardening was begun, and frequently ended for that year, in a single day. For the chances were that the seeds were planted and forgotten, or if edible, such as peanuts or goobers, they were furtively dug up and eaten, or else dug up before germination to see how they got on, and conclusions reached by the impatient gardener that the seed were of no account anyway.

The burning of "plant patches" possessed particular charm for the boys, for the glorious bonfire all to oneself was to be looked forward to each year

until the childish plaything became a stern reality and necessity, when it lost its charm, as did many other pleasures of childhood.

On one occasion, when Punch and Don were younger, a rainy day thwarted their plans of burning the patch, but the wood had been patiently and laboriously brought before it had begun to rain, and, being impatient to carry out their purpose, Don sought a shelter where the burning could be carried on without the inconvenience of being wetted, but finding none, presently Punch said:

“I tell yo’ whut, Don, I know whar’ we kin fin’ er prime place fer ter bu’n er plan’ patch.”

“Where?” asked Don.

“Down yonder un’ de po’ch.”

“That’s so; I wonder why I didn’t think about that. Come on then, le’s bring the wood,” said he as he started to the pile of wood which had been so carefully gathered.

The wood was soon brought and piled under the high overhanging porch, where the ground was dry and powdery. There it was placed in what they thought a suitable manner, and Don went into the kitchen to get a coal of fire, from whence he soon returned with a live coal between the two pieces of wood he had taken to carry it. The fire was soon lighted and as the dense volumes of curling white smoke arose from the kindling fire, they were ready to shout with glee. The flames were bursting out between the sticks of wood now, when suddenly they heard rapid footsteps along the porch over their heads, and then Mr. Morton calling loudly:

“Mary, Mary! Why’n thunder don’t you answer me, Mary!”

“Seh,” replied Mary as she flung wide the door.

“Where is that smoke coming from?”

“I don’ know whar’ hit cum fum. I ’spec’ Don an’ Punch mus’ be playin’ wid fyer sumwhar’ nur’r.”

“Look!” shouted Mr. Morton.

With this terse command, Mary darted out into

the yard to find the source of mischief, and suddenly screamed :

"Heah dey. I said so; now I know de house gwine bu'n up. Run heah, Mis' Morton; run heah, quick!"

Mr. Morton ran down the steps as fast as he could, and without saying a word scattered the flaming wood out in the rain, where the fire was soon extinguished.

"What did you little rascals make the fire there for? Don't you know you will burn the house down?"

Don looked at Punch, and the latter hung his head and looked flagrantly guilty; but Don, feeling the silence embarrassing, said :

"Father, we were just burnin' a plant patch, and we didn't think about the fire doin' any harm to the house, or we never would have done it."

"Plant patch!" exclaimed the boy's father, as he laughed, which added to the confusion of Don, who grew more solemn, and then began to sob.

"Why, my son, under the porch is not a suitable place to burn plant beds, so stop crying and I will get John to make you a sure-enough plant patch in the woods. But never let me catch you burning any more under the house, because you might burn us all up. You, too, Punch; do you both hear what I say?"

"Yas seh," said the boys in unison, as their hearts became unburdened, for they fully expected a whipping.

As Mr. Morton walked away, they both saw a twinkle of fun in his eyes, and as he reached his wife's presence he broke into a loud laugh as he told what had happened, saying :

"Those boys are the most ingenious for inventing deviltry of some sort or other that I have ever seen. I wonder what they will do next."

As the sun became warmer, the tramp to school was more tiresome to Don than ever, for the days

were longer now, the air was balmy, and the odor of the woods was delicious; but it seemed to him that Nature's effort to quicken his ambitions for learning at this particular time of the year was altogether a misdirection of effort on her part, as it was a waste of glorious days to be shut up for hours with dull books, and dull, droning scholars, who had made up their minds long ago to remain out of doors to the very limit permitted by the teacher, now, to Don, grown duller and more cross than ever.

It was no wonder, then, as the close of the school session approached, that Don frequently asked to remain abed later because of a bad headache or a sick stomach, which latter affection was so well simulated that sometimes no breakfast could be retained. But it was remarked by his parents that nine o'clock was a wonderful remedy, for directly that hour came signs of rapid recovery became manifest, and when ten o'clock had come, every evidence of recovery had been established. When, however, there was some talk of Don going to school for half the day, there was an immediate relapse, which soon disappeared, and in a marvelously short time he would be with Punch. Oh, how he envied Punch! Of what use were books, anyway, but to pester a fellow during these all-too rapidly passing days, and everybody knew fish would not bite nor robins prance about and chirp to one another in the furrow after worms when summer had come.

Punch, after learning something of the happenings to sundry rats, cats, balls, boys and other nonsense, as he thought, relinquished for a while his school duties to the more pleasant ones out of doors. And it is truly wonderful how often he was called upon to slake his thirst. Then he was at great pains to go to the spring the most remote from where he was working. There for a blissful period the boy would pull out a cotton line from his ragged "britches" pocket, dexterously bend a pin, tie it to the line, to which had already been affixed a cork

stopper. A rough pole served as a rod, and bait was found beneath the nearest cornstalk. How briskly the frisky little fishes bit there in the holes in the ditches, and before long there would be the whisk of the line through the air with a glistening object on the end, and Punch would rush up the bank before his prey fluttered back into the water, saying to himself aloud meanwhile:

"I tol' yo' ter stop foolin' 'long me er I gwine cotch yo'; now I dun dun hit. Now git on dis switch," and with this Punch would slip his victim on a willow twig, and again cast his line.

Presently the stentorian voice of his father would be heard calling:

"Punch; aw Punch! Ef yo' don' cum 'way fum dat spring, I gwine wyar yo' out!"

Then Punch would reluctantly wind up his line, pocket his living and wriggling fish, and emerge from the clump of trees about the spring with just as innocent an air as if he had just gone there.

Even John himself could not resist the temptation to fish, so he had thrown in several sling lines along the river bank, which he would look to at intervals while plowing.

Presently Don was old enough to trust with a gun, and his father bought him a light one. His first essay at hunting was shooting robins, and his joy at bringing down the first one was beyond words. Punch, too, was elated, and followed Don about as gun-bearer, pointing out good shots to his companion. How Punch's hands itched to carry the firearm, and when Don generously permitted him to use it he could have jumped with joy. The first opportunity presented itself—a fat robin busy eating worms in a furrow.

"Want a rest, Punch?"

"Whut I wan' wid er res'?" asked the self-confident boy. "Huccom' I cyarn' hol' er gun jus' lek daddy?"

"Because you are not strong enough."

"G'way, Don. I gwine show yo' better'n I kin tell yo'." The gun was brought clumsily to his shoulder, for this was Punch's first shot. After an inordinate suspense, during which Don shut and opened his eyes repeatedly, wondering how much longer Punch was going to sight, he heard him indistinctly mutter, to the bird presumably, "Ef yo' don' hol' still I gwine kill you'."

The aim was taken at last, when there was a cry from Don of "stop,, stop;" but it was too late; the hammer fell and the charge exploded, throwing Punch prostrate in the furrow, while the greater part of the charge entered the skin of old Nero, who, unwisely ventured within the line of fire, had been the cause of Don's urgent command.

"Hi, whut marter wid dat gun? Now, yo' ole fool, I 'spec' yo' gwine keep yo' nose outer folks' biz'-ness," said Punch, addressing the latter sentence to Nero. "Heah, Nero, heah! I sho' is sorry I hu't my ole boy," continued the repentant Punch as he examined the dog's wounds, which were more bloody than harmful. He petted him kindly on the head, and the dog seemed to forgive in a moment the sins of his master.

"Don, I thought sho' I gwine kill dat burd dat time," said the abashed boy as he examined the gun to see if it, too, had come to harm; but it was not injured.

Punch then began to load, in ardent hope that another opportunity might present itself, that he might prove beyond suspicion that he was not afraid to shoot. When Don handed him the gun he also gave him the shot pouch and powder horn, and while Don was looking elsewhere he poured out a charge of shot, which he transferred to the gun: but when the powder was to be measured he thought it best to ask Don about it. So, pouring out at least three charges of the powder in his hand, which trembled so with excitement that at least half was lost, he asked Don if he thought that enough.

"Yes, and too much, too; but didn't you just put the shot in?"

"Yass, co'se I did. Ain' I dun seed 'nuff guns loaded 'fo' now."

"Ha, ha," laughed Don; "don't you know, boy, you don't put the shot in first."

"Dat so, I sho' did fergit which. I know'd twus one er tur'r. Enyhow, dey bofe goes in de gun, an' I know dat's a sho' fac'."

The gun was soon properly loaded, and Punch again given an opportunity to prove his marksmanship, which he did by wounding a robin so that it could not fly, and all because it was so unlucky as to be one of a flock that permitted the young Nimrod to come too close.

Throwing the gun down unceremoniously when he saw the effect of his shot, he ran after the fluttering bird until it was caught, and then cruelly strangled it. Oh! how proud he was as he held his trophy aloft and shouted to Don to "look." He was so jubilant that he felt as if walking on air. Nor did the gun "kick" so this time, for Don had forewarned him to hold the stock close up against his shoulder.

The spring was all too soon ended, and Punch, kept busy as he was doing such work as best suited his years, felt the loss of those dreamy days that seemed made for youth and love. The long rows of corn that he had to drop seemed endless, and the heavy baskets of tobacco plants that it fell to his lot to distribute made his arms ache, but when Saturday afternoon came, he was free. It was then that he had no interruptions while plying his fishing line in company with his *alter ego* Don, and the stimulus produced by an "I lay you," offered by Punch, that he would catch the first fish made the sport doubly exciting.

Instead of a child, one would think it an old man fishing, for Punch had long ago learned that fishermen, that is, good ones, are not only patient, but

quiet. He had very great difficulty, however, in instilling this fact into the mind of Don, and he would be obliged to remind him frequently:

"Don, whyn't yo' stop dat fuss; fish ain' gwine bite wid all dat racket gwine on."

"Aw go 'way, Punch! You know fish can't hear like we can; and if they could they wouldn't know what it was, because the water is so muddy."

"Dat ain' nuttin'. Dey ain' gwine bite ef yo' don' stop treadin' on co'nstalks."

Don had great respect for Punch's piscatory knowledge, so did not dispute the point; but while carelessly standing on a projecting piece of turf watching Punch bait his hook, and just asking why he spat on the hook afterwards, the turf gave way and fell into the ditch with a loud splash. Don would have gone with it had not Punch seized him by the arm.

"Dar, now; ef dat don' beat de ole Scratch! Don, how is we gwine ketch eny fish ef yo' keep er doin' lek dat. Dem fish got sense. Dey ain' gwine jump out de ditch. I don't keer how much yo' fling in dar."

"I didn't go to do it, boy," said Don, his mettle somewhat touched; "and I don't care if you never catch any more fish if you talk like that."

"Hesh, Don. Heah, gimme yo' line an' lemme fix it fer you'."

Don, much mortified, gave him the line. Punch, putting down his own, cut a suitable pole for a rod and tied the line to it, baited it, gave the bait a baptism *secundum artem*, and resigned it to Don to cast.

The line was cast in a shallow part of the hole, but fish would not bite. Punch had already won his wager, for several minnows and perch lay gasping in the sand.

Don resolved on another cast, and this time succeeded in hopelessly entangling his line in the willows far out of reach.

"Now yo' dun dun hit," said Punch, as he again put down his pole, while Don was almost crying with vexation and envy. Then Punch climbed out on the projecting willow, at eminent risk of falling in, and untangled the line, which Don recovered again with:

"You're mighty good to me, Punch."

"Shucks, dat ain' nuttin'! Ef fishin' is es hard ter yo' es readin' an' writin' ter me, I'se willin' ter do er heap more 'n dis."

The line was baited and recast, this time in the midst of a whole school of fish, and Don's success was so pronounced that he forgot his former failures, and in due course of time proudly returned home with his catch.

When Punch had learned how to swim he was very enthusiastic about teaching Don all he had learned himself, which, if magnified several times, would not pass for a great deal; but he possessed to a remarkable degree that which is so essential to swimmers—confidence. Because he could swim across ice ponds without pausing to rest, he was sure he could swim the river as easily, but his father had told him, in language that he could not fail to comprehend, that "Ef I uver ketch yo' in dat river, boy, I gwine bu'n yo' up," which Punch understood to mean that he would get such a whipping as never before was visited upon him. Therefore Punch ventured no farther than the limits of the ice pond or mouths of ditches. Don, however, possessed the spirit of daring and venturesomeness that prompted him to do, or at least attempt, that which was difficult for the stronger of the two. Several times his father had taken him in bathing with himself and with others, while Punch, if present, would sit longingly looking on, fairly hungry for a good swim in that forbidden place. Don would cry to him from the cool rippling water to come in, but though his voice was more enticing and tempting than a siren's,

he would evade the invitation by some excuse or by saying " 'tain' while."

Before the summer ended both the boys had become excellent swimmers, and frequently now they "washed" (not bathed, if you please) in a hole at the mouth of one of the big ditches. Just below the ditch mouth the river narrowed into a deep, swift current as it swept around an island which narrowed the stream to half its width, for very little water passed around the island on the other side.

The little steamer *Jean* that plied on the river usually stopped below the island to get a full head of steam before she ventured to stem the current, and while many swimmers had gone down the stream, Mr. Morton amongst the number, none had come up, for no human strength could swim against that tide of rushing water.

Punch and Don both had a superstitious horror of that part of the river, and Don had often wondered if his father was not afraid to swim down the seething torrent. The boys had frequently pulled up cornstalks to throw into the innumerable whirlpools that they called "suck holes," and shuddered with an uneasy feeling, coupled with wonder, that the rubbish would go around and then disappear, and for all they knew continue down, down to an unfathomable depth that made their heads dizzy and their hearts sick. Then there were glossy, glistening spots of water that resembled most the turmoil set up by a boiling caldron of liquid. In one place the force of the water was so great that it had bent an overhanging willow as if about to break it, which, being released from its power, would return to its former position with a loud splash that sent the spray flying.

On a hot August afternoon the boys had come to "wash" in their favorite hole, and were disporting themselves to their hearts' content, neither thinking of harm. Punch was watching Don in his attempts

at a new stroke that he had been trying ever since seeing his father do it. So interested had both become that they were unaware that they had transgressed their parents' injunctions, and were well in the river before they were conscious of it.

"Don, Don, we in de river, boy!" cried Punch.

Don was interested, and failed to hear, but, seeing his lips move, knew he had spoken, and saw him climbing up the bank.

"Cum out, Don; yo' in de river. Did'n' yo' know hit?"

Don tried to touch bottom, but failed. He then made a desperate plunge for shallow water and again failed. He was weakened now from fright, and the water was gently drifting him beneath some overhanging willows, which he grasped, but they snapped like dried grass. The current becoming swifter now, the boy cried out:

"Save me, Punch! I'm gone. Save me!" and then he was within a rush of water that spun him along like a cork.

Punch at first thought Don capable of coming out by himself, and failed to realize that he was in water too deep for him until he had called to him; even then he hesitated one brief instant, as if undecided what to do. Then, with the speed of an arrow, he ran up the river bank to see if he could see Don, and thence along the sandy cliff that had been excavated by the swift current.

He was too frightened to call or to cry, but jumping down the cliff, which he had never dared do before, he rushed to the edge of the foaming, dashing water, stopping a moment to see if he saw Don. In a moment he caught sight of him as he rushed by. Don saw him one brief instant before his head was again engulfed, and his appealing eyes Punch could withstand no longer, although the helpless boy could not cry out.

"I don' keer whut dey say, I gwine save him er I gwine drown wid him." With this thought Punch

shut his eyes and jumped into the river, with probably the same hope of returning alive as if he had jumped headlong over a precipice.

The rapid current bore him along helplessly its own way, and but little was accomplished by his strokes other than keeping him afloat. By one of those lucky accidents to which some have attributed a special Providence that has ward over children and others who become such, Don floated up to the over-hanging willow already mentioned just as the trunk had been bent down by the rush of water, and as it was released it brought up the boy, and the weight of the body only permitted it to sway back and forth while his insensible form hung on the trunk with his head and feet in the water.

Close behind him followed Punch, totally in the power of the current, and as he struck the projecting tree his body was swept under it, but he had sufficient presence of mind to grasp a firm hold that prevented his being swept away. He managed to pull himself up closer to the trunk and then put his arm over it, thus lifting himself partially out of the water and leaving one arm free. Then, slowly inching himself along, he reached Don, and laboriously raised his head out of the water and rested it on a convenient limb. This effort so nearly exhausted the child that several times he came very nearly losing his hold. But knowing that another's life, as well as his own, depended upon his endurance, he still held fast. Until then he had not uttered a cry of alarm, but a passing kingfisher that flew overhead crying its discordant note and looking apathetically down upon him in his distress, reminded him that he too could cry out for help, which he accordingly did.

"Run heah, sumbody! He'p! He'p! Sumbody please, seh, run heah!"

Nobody came, but the echo repeated his pathetic cries until the poor boy was provoked to exasperation. The water gurgled and foamed about him, and

its pale, greenish tinge reminded him of "pizin," while the rush of the current kept dashing and beating him until he was sore from head to foot. Nobody was ever coming, he thought, and he and Don would drown; but prompted to make another desperate effort, he swelled his lungs almost to bursting, and sent forth a cry that was so touching in its pathos it would have moved any heart, for it was the wail of one that had been abandoned to despair.

Still the mocking echo. His arms and hands grew numb, the mocking water bubbled along unconcernedly. Despairing of rescue, the boy began to cry, and the hot tears made him conscious that the end must be very near; so, straining closer to Don by a mighty effort, he took his head in his arms and kissed his pallid lips a long, long farewell. Just then there was a crash through the dried grass on the river bank, and John rushed to the willow, exclaiming:

"Hol' on, Punch, daddy gwine save yo'! Hol' on, boy! Steady, now, steady; hol' ter whut yo' got."

Then John cautiously walked out on the willow, with much fear of losing his footing, which would have proved disastrous, because he could not swim a stroke.

Seizing Punch by the arm, he drew him up, and in a moment had him safely on the bank.

Returning for Don, he bore him softly from his dangerous position; but he was unconscious, and when he was stretched out on the sand John's knowledge of human ailments could not assist him in ascertaining whether he was alive or no.

"Run ter de house, Punch! No, wait; run down yonder an' git Dolly! No, dat tek too long. Dis be bes'."

Suiting the action to the word, he flung the unconscious Don over his shoulder and swept through the cornfield like the wind. Reaching Dolly he attempted to place his burden on her bare back, but she gave a snort of dissent that made John cry:

"Wey, yo' du'n fool: dis ain' nobody but Don;
whut marter 'long yo'!"

With this she seemed quieted, and permitted him to lay Don over her back like a slain deer, and with a spring he was upon her, and galloping through the corn at a breakneck rate.

Don's head being permitted to hang down so that the water could run out of his lungs, together with the unusual jolting, soon restored respiration. John stopped now and then to see if he breathed, and when at last he was quite sure that he lived he uttered a profound: "Thank Gawd! Now we kin tek hit sorter e'sy, cyarn' us, Dolly?

"Aw, Punch, Punch! Hurry up and bring Don's clo's on heah," called John as he stopped beneath a shady walnut tree and gently laid Don on the grass.

Punch hastened to where his and Don's clothing lay, and seizing both piles he fled precipitately from the place that had so nearly proved his last sight of earth, nor did he dress until he had caught up with his father.

Don had regained consciousness now, and though bewildered he submitted to being dressed and taken home, where John explained his condition by saying:

"He leetle mo' lek ter git drownded."

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN LOVE BEGINS.

Don was so exhausted when John reached the house that he was put to bed, and the constant and solicitous attention of a devoted mother soon made him comfortable.

Just before going to sleep after his terrible mental agony he asked:

"Mother, where is Punch?"

"He went off with his father, my boy," answered she.

"He didn't get drowned, did he?"

"No, son; didn't you see him just now? He was here a little while ago."

"Was he? I don't remember it, I'm so sleepy."

"There, go to sleep then, and I will call him when you wake up."

The mother watched her child until he was asleep, then left him to see about some household affairs.

"Cum heah, Punch," said his father as he stopped out of hearing of the house and snapped off several willow switches. "Don' yo' heah me, boy? I say cum heah!"

Punch began to cry.

"Didn' I tol' yo' dat uver I catch yo' in dat river I gwine bu'n yo' up? Cum heah, seh."

"Daddy, don' whup me dis time. I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd—"

"Didn' I tol' yo' not ter go dar'? Didn' I, heh? Didn' I, heh?"

And Punch was rewarded for his heroism by such a thrashing as he had never before had from his

father. He occasionally paused in whipping to ask, "Didn' I, heh?" but gave the boy no opportunity to vindicate himself.

John was one of those parents who punished the child first and heard excuses afterwards, if he even deigned to listen at all, which was the case in this instance.

As soon as he thought Punch dressed down becomingly, he threw him from him roughly, exclaiming:

"Ef I uver catch yo' dar ag'in dis whuppin' ain' nuttin', 'tain' nuttin' ter whut I gwine do."

"But, daddy, I didn't—" began Punch.

"Shet up, boy; didn't I see yo'. I gwine whup you pres'n'y fer lyin'. Now go home, seh."

Here he walked off, and left the disconsolate Punch, who was afraid to venture a word more, nor did he think his devotion to Don worth while parading before the vulgar world, so he then and there determined to say nothing more about his ineffectual effort to save Don, in which he, in his own opinion, so disgracefully failed. How heartily he wished that his miserable existence had been ended there in the furious water, and that he had been spared the torture of being so misunderstood—not even having been listened to.

The spirits of this insuppressible boy soon revived, however, and before nightfall he and Don were playing as if nothing had happened, for the latter, being rested and refreshed by his sleep, seemed none the worse for his adventure.

"Punch, what did you do after I saw you last?"

"I fell in tryin' ter git yo' out, an' leetle mo' lek ter git drownded, too," he replied. This, while not conforming to the exact truth, satisfied Don. He said no more about it, but the favorite "washing" hole was avoided in future, and whenever either of them happened near the spot they shuddered to think of their narrow escape.

Mr. Morton, on being informed of Don's adven-

ture, called up John and asked him where he found him.

"Down dar, hangin' over de willow whar' de water so swif', lek a drownded cat."

"What? Down yonder in the river by that old willow? Talk, man!"

"Yas, seh; yas, seh, dat's whar' dey wus, bofe un 'em."

"John, you have repaid me a thousand times over for the little I have done for you," said Mr. Morton as his voice became unsteady. "I know how you felt that terrible night, but you have brought mine back alive, John, and I feel like going down on my knees in gratitude to you."

"Seh! Hol' on, hol' on Marse Flo'noy; yo' mus' be losin' yo' min'. Yo' ain' gwine nowhar', 'ka'se I didn' do nuttin' 'cept pick Don out de river lek er half-drownded cat. Humph, dat ain' nuttin'."

"Was Punch with him, then? You said 'they'?"

"Yas, seh; dat fool boy gwine git drownded yit."

"How came the boys in the river? I have told Don never to go in without me."

"I don' know, seh. I knows dat, too; but whut yo' say ter dem boys goes in one year an' cums out tur'r."

"John, there is nothing, man, that I would not do for you. You have saved me from being the most miserable man in the world, and have laid me under such obligations to you that I am very certain I can't hope to make return. John, if you ever need a friend, if you are in trouble, or sick, if you will let me know I will go to the end of the earth to help you."

"Humph, I knowed dat all de time."

In vain did John try to conceal his emotion by answering so generous a speech so brusquely. In fact, both men parted rather abruptly here, for no other apparent reason than that every effort to speak produced an unpleasant choking sensation. So they had come to the mutual conclusion that it

would be far better to postpone any further conversation on the matter until a more propitious season.

Nobody knew of Punch's heroism, and he thought little of the sublime courage that prompted him to voluntarily offer himself as a means of saving his friend. He did it with the same volition that would have prompted him to share an apple, and his act in either case would not have been thought by him worthy of telling, especially since failure attended his efforts and all attempted explanations relative to his reasons for being in such a dangerous position were ignored by his father. So Punch wisely refrained from further discussion of the affair, and here the matter rested.

Certain changes in the Morton family, before the events just recorded took place, had made necessary the employment of a nurse to take in charge the cause of it all, and after a great many changes, for one cause or another, Judith Williams was the last bidder for the favor of the imperious little miss who was the household devotion.

Judith had not been in the Morton home twenty-four hours before Punch became aware of the fact, and as she had come from a distant farm, he had never seen her, and in consequence was afire with curiosity to know what she was like.

One balmy evening toward the close of August, Jude, for this is what everybody called her, was out in the yard amusing her cooing charge, when Punch silently made his way up to where she was sitting and endeavored to see what kind of a girl she was without being seen. Punch had availed himself of a little bush as a screen, but in his eager desire to satisfy his curiosity he was so imprudent as to make a noise that made his presence known to Jude. She, without manifesting any cognizance of his place of hiding, quietly laid the baby down on the grass and picked up a piece of watermelon rind lying near, and flung it with true precision

into the lilac bush, striking his faintly outlined figure.

"Whut yo' dat fer, gal?"

"Whut yo' cum pokin' roun' heah lek dat fer? I let yo' know right now, I ain' skeered er yo'."

"Who said yo' wus skeered? I didn' say so, but I 'spec' yo' wus, dat's huccom' yo' hit me wid dat watermillion rin'. Folks don' hit one 'nur' wid watermillion rin' when dey meets, dey shek han's an' say: 'Howdy, bre'r, an' 'Howdy, sister.' Dat's whut dey do up heah whar' we folks live. Humph, whar' yo' cum fum, gal?"

This question was asked with an air of superiority that would have made anybody wonder at the boy's assumption.

"Yo' ain' got nuttin' ter do wid whar' I cum fum. Now yo' got hit. Who is yo' enyhow, boy?"

"I'se Punch; dat is, dat's whut dey calls me, but my name is Jim, arter Unc' Jim dat runs on de railroad. Whut yo' name?"

"My name? Humph, dat fer me ter know an' yo' ter fin' out de bes' yo' kin. Who is yo' ter cum pokin' 'roun' axin' folks dey names, heh? I don' tell ev'ybody who I is, 'kase dey mout know es much es I dus."

"Dat's all right, Sukey. Ef yo' don' tell me I gwine fin' out who yo' is, yo' see if I don'."

"Look heah, boy; whut dat yo' call me, 'Sukey'? I wan' let yo' know my name is Jude, an' I bin in de habit er hittin' folks dat call me outer my name; an' yo' do it ag'in an' I gwine buss' dis rin' over yo' braggin' haid. You heah dat, don' yo'?"

"Yass, I heahs whut yo' say 'bout buss'in' folks hails open, Jude; but dat ain' nuttin', I gits mine busted enytime, 'twel I dun got useter hit."

"I'll Jude yo'! Who tol' yo' who I wus, yo' li'l nappy-haid?"

"Yo' jes' tol' me dis minit. Is yo' crazy? Huccom' yo' don' know dat?"

For reply a sodden piece of watermelon rind

struck him just above the ear, and the juice ran down his neck much to his discomfort and the wounding of his pride.

A moment he stood, as if designing some mischief to the girl who stood before him with twinkling eyes and mouth wide open, giving vent to peal after peal of merry laughter, that at first provoked him; then, seizing a piece of the same rind from the ground, he made a dash for her, but she was too quick for him, and being as fleet as a fox, she flew over the yard with Punch at her heels, threatening evil things with the watermelon rind. The chase was soon over, for Punch soon tired out his quarry, but not before the yard had been traversed several times. On being caught the mischievous girl pleaded forgiveness, but Punch was determined to repay her, and accordingly rubbed her face with the rind and saturated her hair in the juice. When he desisted the girl gave him a look of mock defiance and a slap on the cheek that set the boy's head to tingling with pleasure, then breaking from him returned to get the baby, and by a detour entered the kitchen, where she proceeded to make herself presentable once more. Punch saying as she departed:

"Now yo' ain' gwine prodjik wid me no mo', is yo'?"

Thus, in this most unconventional manner, Punch and Judith became acquainted with one another.

Judith was one of those girls that loved mischief. She was as robust as a boy, and her predilection for following the boys wherever they went had brought upon her reprimands untold in number, and even worse punishment; but she still persisted in spite of them, and would frequently return to the house with a torn dress, the baby bedraggled with mud and grass stains, which she had been so unlucky as to acquire in the course of exploring some branch or ditch in company with Don and Punch.

When she came to make her home with the Mortons she was about ten years old, and except for being very quick in her movements, alert and good humored, one could not see much difference between her and thousands of other girls seen every day.

She was lithe, tall for her age, straight, and graceful, as children of her age seldom are. Her face was an oval, her brow broad for one of her race, and the eyes, of a bewitching brown, had the merry twinkle we already know of. Her hair was soft, and curled into tight kinks of a glossy black, that defied any comb made by mortal man to assail their virgin depths. The flattening of her nose was not so marked as usual in one of her race.

The cheerfulness of her face, the perpetual good humor, and, of course, her affection for the children younger than herself made the little Nelly so love her that she would gladly leave her mother for the nurse. This to the lasting boast of Jude, who was as proud of the fact as if the child acknowledged her as mother.

Jude had lost her mother in early childhood, and her father, being blessed with a more numerous progeny than he could possibly provide for, had given her to an aunt who had no children. Thus had the girl been deprived early in life of a mother's love and direction. While her aunt did not treat her unkindly, she was not a mother, nor knew what the maternal love meant. Her aunt's husband, however, made her life very unhappy, and scolded her, and frequently resorted to beating, that cowed even this spirited child. Seeing this, her Aunt Maria said one morning:

"Jude, I dun foun' er place fer yo', arter lookin' fer a long time. Dus yo' wan' ter lef' me, Jude?"

"No'm; but I dus Unc' Nat, 'ka'se he don' treat me good."

"Waal, I heah tell Mis' Morton, down on de river, wan's er gal ter nurse his baby, an' I gwine tek yo'

down dar ter see his lady, an' if yo' suits, dus yo' wan' ter go?"

"Yas'm; dat is, I wan' ter go, but I don' wan' ter lef' yo'."

"Waal, whut dus yo' wan' do mos'?"

"I wan' ter go, but I sho' dus hate fer ter lef' yo'," said the child as she affectionately took her aunt's hand and clung to it eagerly, as if longing for something to love.

"Waal, yo' kin go den. I know Nat ain' treat yo' right; but he ain' gwine lis'en ter me, an' ef yo' ruther, yo' better go."

This is how it happened that Jude came to live with the Morton family, where her ardent desire to love, and to be loved, found an admirer in the little miss who so frequently made distraction in the family when her object of affection was absent.

Maybe if it were really known, she might have confessed to herself, even at this early period, a liking for Punch, that grew day after day, until she dreamed of the happy life when they would be grown up and married. How she could plan!

How delightful it is, when we have grown old, to remember again those unapproachable days of childhood and the ravishment of our first love. Then it was that the mere mention of the name we loved sent the hot blood tingling through our veins, and a feeling of ecstatic delight came over us that was Elysium. The feeling of a suffused warmth pervaded the body, and a confusion prevailed that made us so very, very absent-minded. When the object of our devotion came upon us suddenly, how we did feel as though we could defer the happiness of being with him or her, preferring for the moment to enjoy some lesser delight, and reserve the greatest and best until the last, just as we do wine. Or, when a third person happened to be present, how awkward and silly did we both become as we in vain sought to be at ease or to converse.

So it was with Jude and Punch, and while in so

youthful a pair it was not noticed by others, the two were constantly at great pains to keep their secret inviolable. The children were naturally together a great deal, and when Jude's work was over for the night she would go home with Punch to stay until bedtime, for she slept at the house. Punch therefore thought himself the most lucky of boys to possess such a sweetheart.

The differences between the two after their mutual introduction were soon forgotten, if we judge from what might have been heard a morning or two later, when Punch was taking Dolly to the low-grounds and saw Jude picking up chips at the wood-pile.

"Hey, Jude, how yo' lek de way I washed yo' face tur'r night? I spec' yo' needed it," said he, stopping.

"G'way fum heah. Don' fool wid me; I ain' got time fer prodjikin'. Whut yo' wash my face lek dat fer? I ain' use'ter hit, an' yo' sho' is rough, boy."

"Humph! Whut yo' fling dat rin' at me fer, den? I don' lek dat nur'r."

"I 'clar', Punch, I didn' go ter do hit; but I didn' know who yo' wus at fus', an' de lars' time I didn' much keer. Yo' sho' did look funny de lars' time, wid de water jes' er runnin' down yo' naik an' yo' wipin' fas' es yo' kin. Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the girl as the ludicrous situation was called to mind.

"Whut yo' laffin' fer now?" asked Punch as he slid from the mule's back, and with a feeling of luxurious idleness sat down on the end of a log and waited for a reply, occasionally tossing a chip idly into the basket.,

"I'se laffin' at yo' de way yo' dun tur'r night," answered the mischievous girl.

"Shucks! Dat dun dun too long ergo ter think 'bout now, an' I ain' seed whar 'twas funny, needer."

"Whut yo' settin' dar fer, boy; why'n't yo' he'p pick up chips, er go down ter de lowgrounds? Unc' John gwine bu'n yo' up fer foolin' roun' heah," said Jude slyly, as if to see what Punch would do, for if the truth were known she would have preferred him nowhere else in the world than where he was, still she pretended not to be content.

Oh you coy little minx! You would have Punch eat his heart out for love of you, and do your best to deceive him into thinking you would prefer him going on to the lowgrounds. How soon do women take lessons in that school of artifice and deception that serves to wreck hope when it is most strong.

"Yo' sho' is bin er long time fillin' dat basket, gal. I b'lieve yo' gwine tek all day 'dout I he'p yo."

"I don' wan' none er yo' he'p," answered the saucy Jude.

"An' yo' ain' gwine git it 'dout axin' fer it, nur'r."

"Tain' while ter talk so sassy 'bout it: Nobody ain' axed yo' yit."

"Waal, daddy mus' be ti'ed er waitin' fer me, I reck'n, an' I mus' go."

"Punch," called Jude, "cyarn' yo' see I jes' foolin'? Cum on an' he'p me pick up chips. I jes wan' see ef I could mek yo' mad, an' I dun it fus' go."

"Shucks, I ain' mad!" exclaimed the delighted boy as he began to load chips into the basket at such an alarming rate that it was in imminent danger of being immediately filled, a culmination not to be thought of by the resourceful Jude, who otherwise would have to resort to some other trick to detain him, maybe.

From the distant lowgrounds could now be heard a voice calling for somebody, and if we could have been near enough we might have heard John calling until his voice was hoarse:

"Punch, Punch, ef yo' don' bring dat mule heah, I gwine cum arter yo'!"

Punch soon recognized his father's voice, and

hastily mounting Dolly, urged her into a trot, and answered that he was coming in a shrill and boyish treble.

"I gwine cum back pres'n'y," said he to Jude as he left; but he did not return, because his father put him to work.

Since Jude had come to live with the Mortons, Punch was rarely at home, for he found in the society of this little girl and Don much that delighted him, and caused him in a measure to forget the bad treatment that always was his at home. Often had he gone to his cheerless pallet of ragged quilts on the floor, while his father and his step-mother slept on the bed, which was kept spotlessly clean. This was because the children avoided it like a plague. All of them had learned from bitter experience how costly it was to venture a romp on it, and confined themselves to the pallets.

Many nights had Punch gone to his bed thinking of the difference between the woman his father had married and his mother. It is true the latter promised him thousands of whippings that he never got, nor dreamed that he would get; but Elvira rarely promised, but gave them instead, with the slightest provocation, until the poor child felt a loathing for her and an utter dislike of home. So no wonder when the child found more pleasant company in which to spend his time, that he sought it.

When the delightful autumn days came again, Punch, Don, and Jude, accompanied by the baby, wandered deep into the gorgeous woods in search of hickory nuts and wild grapes. Then with what pleasure Punch exhibited to his little sweetheart his favorite hickory nut tree, and with the agility of a monkey climbed up in the branches and shook the hard nuts down in a pelting storm, that caused the girl to scamper from under the tree to a safer place, exclaiming meanwhile:

"Whut yo' doin' boy? Yo' mus' be tryin' ter bus' we hails open."

There came a mischievous giggle from above, and—

“Why’n’t yo’ git outer de way den?”

“ ‘Ka’se yo’ didn’t tell me.”

“Ain’ yo’ got sense ‘nuff ter know de hick’ nuts got ter cum down?”

Punch’s pockets became plethoric, as did Jude’s apron, and then they looked deeper in the woods for grapes. Presently they stopped before a vine loaded with them. Punch and Don both offered tempting bunches to Jude, who reached eagerly for them and took a generous mouthful, while the boys awaited results.

They were instantly forthcoming, for with a grimace and a sputter she expelled them, amid howls of laughter from the boys. In fact, Punch was so overcome with mirth that he lost his balance and fell sprawling at Jude’s feet, who, taking advantage of her tormentor, fell to and began to pummel him with her fists, which he not only did not mind, but thought the acme of human enjoyment.

“Hi, gal, didn’t yo’ know dem wus burd grapes? Folks don’ eat ‘em. Dat is, I ain’ nuver seed nobody could git away wid ‘em. I don’ b’lieve burds loves ‘em much, ‘ka’se dey stays on de vine twel snow dun cum. Now an’ den I see a sparrer try ter mek out lek dey good, but he cyarn’ fool me, huh, eh! Now I gwine git yo’ sum fox grapes dat gwine ter put er tas’e in yo’ mouf jes as sho’s yo’ bo’n.”

With this Punch darted through the bushes like a frightened hare, and in an incredibly short time returned with a bunch of rich, luscious grapes, which he proved the edible quality of by eating several in Jude’s presence.

“Now yo’ jes’ try dese, an’ ef dey ain’ de bes’ yo’ over qurled er lip over, yo’ kin have my ole hat.”

“Dey sho’ is good. Le’s git sum fer Mis’ Marg’ret b’fo’ we go.”

With a heart bounding with enthusiasm and joy, the boy showed the way to the place where a number of vines grew which were laden with the luscious fruit. As many were gathered as could be carried, and then Don, taking it into his head to wander off somewhere, the baby was given a seat on a heap of clean fallen leaves, and a few unshelled nuts to play with, and then Jude and Punch began to crack and eat the nuts that they had gathered.

Between two "rocks" they cracked them, and sitting vis a vis with their feet spread out they were an interesting pair. Punch cracked several nuts for Jude, but she, in attempting to do so for herself, pounded her finger severely instead, and the blood spurted, and she cried with pain. Punch seized the injured hand in his own and soothingly said:

"Hesh, Jude. I know it hurts; but heah, lemme twis' dis leaf roun' yo' finger."

Jude willingly permitted the finger to be bound up and the leaf pinned with a thorn.

"You's mighty good ter me, Punch," sobbed Jude.

"Nor I ain'. I don' call dat good. I'd er dun dat fer enybody. Jude, I tell yo' whut, le's us be sweethearts. I dunno much whut yo' dus, but jes' le's be, enyhow."

"Waal," replied the innocent Jude.

"Waal, one thing dat yo' dus when yo' is sweethearts is fer ter kiss one 'nur'r, ain' it?"

"I 'spec' so," coyly replied Jude.

Punch conformed to regulations.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR HERO BECOMES OLDER.

Punch had now become a sturdy boy of about fifteen. The hard work on the farm had but sufficed to make him reliant, self-confident, and a believer that he could make of himself whatever he determined to be.

The relations at his home had not changed, for Elvira sought every opportunity to persecute him with her embittered tongue, and even now ventured to use the lash on the boy, but caution prevented her from going beyond the border line of safety, for she recognized the fact that Punch's forbearance was not what it used to be, and the calmness with which he endured her malignity excited in the woman a fear that he might sometime break forth in a fury and do her injury.

Like cowardly spirits, her thought of self overreached all others, and when she found that it was no longer safe to attempt the castigation of Punch alone, she desisted, except upon great provocation. At these times her vile temper even overmastered her discretion, and she would assail the patient boy with a fury that left her marks for days. Her resentment toward Punch became more and more marked as he became advanced in his studies; for the reason probably that her jealous spirit could not brook in others a knowledge which she did not possess, and especially in one that was so much her inferior as Punch, when measured by her own standard of excellence.

The revengeful woman resorted to all sorts of un-

womanly, despicable, and spiteful tricks to prevent Punch from learning; such as hiding his books, or giving them to the children (she had two) to play with, which meant their rapid destruction within an incredibly short time—all during Punch's absence.

More than once had she jerked a new book out of his hand and thrown it back of the fire, where it was consumed in a moment, while she looked him exultingly in the eyes as she stood between him and his burning book.

She could not help noticing the boy's kindling eyes as with a look of surpassing scorn and anger he appeared to defy her, but it was gone like a flash, and he would melt into tears, saying:

"Viry, whut is I dun ter yo'? Huccom' yo' do me so?"

"Yo' lazy, good fer nuttin' scamp, I'se tired er seein' yo' hang roun' me wid er book in yo' han', tryin' fer ter mek out lek yo' ly'arnin', when yo' ain' got sense 'nuff ter bell er buzzard."

"But I gwine ly'arn ef yo' lemme 'lone," ventured Punch.

"Shet up, boy, I ain' gwine heah none er yo' jaw."

Punch accordingly shut up; for once or twice he had disobeyed that injunction and he had so angered his stepmother by his repeated questions and protests that she had given him a whipping. Before resorting to the expedient to be told of, she had destroyed almost every book he had become possessor of, except those he literally wore out in the hopeless task of transferring the knowledge contained in them to his befuddled brain.

Several years before the time of the opening of this chapter, when Punch had despaired of ever learning anything at home, he had gone over to Mr. Morton's, where he waited silently in the kitchen until supper was over. He had come to talk with Jude, for since their mutual agreement down there in the woods that beautiful autumn day, he had never been in trouble that he did not with a

confident heart pour his story in the ear of the sympathetic Jude, who always listened with patience, and advised him like an oracle.

Presently, the supper being over, Jude appeared in the kitchen, where she was frequently called to help Mary, now that Nelly did not require so much care.

"Hey, Punch, whut yo' doin' heah? Whut matter, boy?"

Her lively face grew serious as she saw the grim visage of her sweetheart.

"I'se in troubl', Jude, an' I cum ter see whut yo' would do."

"Git out er hit, dat's whut," she replied.

"G'way wid yo' foolishness, gal. I ain' playin' now."

"Po' boy, who dat dun mek yo' mad, I wunder?"

The sympathy shown in the last sentence of Jude's was too much for the boy, and two big tears ran down his cheeks.

"Dat 'ooman over dar," replied Punch, with a nod toward his home.

Punch had never learned to call his stepmother "mammy," nor could any persuasion have induced him to do so. He reasoned thus: "I ain' nuver had but one mammy, an' yo' sho' cyarn' have two, an' I ain' gwine ter call dat 'ooman mammy fer ter save her life." So he called her "Viry" or "'ooman," whichever suited his mood best.

"Whut she bin doin', Punch?" inquired Jude.

Bin doin' ev'ything dat de debble let her. Jude, dat de meanes' 'ooman dat uver drawed bref."

"Whut she dun?"

"Waal, she dun 'stroyed my books ag'in, an' beat me too. Now whut I gwine do? Ev'ytime I try ter ly'arn sumin', she snatch de book outer my han' an' fling hit hin' de fyer. I dun seed I ain' gwine ly'arn nuttin' dar. Now whut mus' I do?"

"Dat ain' nuttin', boy. I'se got mos' my own way in dis kitchen, an' when yo' wan' ter git yo' lesson,

jes' bring yo' slate an' books an' set heah by de fyer
long es yo' wan' ter. Mis' Marg'ret ain' gwine say
nuttin' an' I ain' gwine say nuttin' 'dout yo' say it
fus'."

"Jude, yo' de bes' li'l' gal in de worl', an' I loves
de ve'y groun' yo' walks on. Yo' sho' is good ter
me," said the boy as he took Jude's hand and pulled
her into a chair beside him, where she remained
but a moment, whether in fear that somebody might
enter the room unannounced or whether the brevity
of her stay beside him she loved was owing to the
tantalizing perverseness of the sex in general, is not
known. But beyond an occasional caress or furtive
kiss, Jude appeared to be always too busy to permit
any prolonged tête à tête, much to the chagrin and
annoyance of Punch.

Thus had Punch found a means of continuing in
a desultory way his rudimentary studies, and to
one possessed of his animal spirits it was by no
means an easy matter to curb himself to his books.
Never having had a teacher other than Don, who
had for the last year been sent off to a distant
academy, he had persisted in his efforts to learn,
and while his path was strewn with innumerable
difficulties, he managed to surmount all of them
that he could and to avoid the rest.

Unlike most heroes, he learned very slowly, and
even Jude took him to task for his stupidity, for she
learned rapidly, as most girls do, and forgot quite as
quickly. Punch, however, when he had become
thoroughly master of a lesson, rarely forgot it, and
could as readily recite correctly the first lesson as
the last, when he had finished his book.

How different had been his experience since he
had come to study his lessons by the fire with Jude.
Not long did he continue in his happiness, however,
for a few nights after everything had been arranged
between the two, Punch arrived home later than
usual, and Elvira was just covering up the fire be-

fore lying down, when she started as the door opened and Punch entered silently.

"Whar yo' bin, boy?" she asked sharply.

"I ain' bin nowhar' but over at de house."

"I know yo' ain' bin nowhar', 'cep' yo' bin over dar wid dat wench Jude all night. Dat ain' nowhar'. Who tol' yo' ter stay 'way fum home lek dat? Yo' ain' no man yit, an' I wan' yo' ter un'erstan' yo' got ter do lek I say do twel yo' g'way fum heah. Yo' heah dat, don' yo'?"

Here her voice was elevated to such a high pitch, which was her custom when she became provoked, that not only was John awakened, but several kinky heads bobbed up to see what was the cause of such an unearthly noise. John, half asleep, asked:

"Whut in de name er Gawd yo' an' Punch fussin' 'bout now, Viry? Let de boy 'lone an' shet yo' mouf, bofe un yo'."

"Yass, dat allus whut yo' say. Let Punch 'lone an' he gwine ter be at de debble nex'," replied she resentfully.

"Nummin' yo', I know whar Punch bin, an' es long as he's wid Jude he ain' gwine git in no troubl'. An' ef he dus, ain' he my chile? Yo' ain' gwine ter bu'n fer whut he dus, so shet up!"

With this John rolled over in the bed, with a grunt of annoyance, and was soon asleep, while Elvira, muttering sullenly to herself, sought her bed, and Punch did likewise; but how sleepless he was, and how restless. A thousand times did he plan for his happiness with Jude, as he lay there on his pallet and gazed with wide-open eyes into the impenetrable gloom of the room. After many hours arranging and disarranging various plans, he succeeded in arranging one that suited him well, and then his tired brain, too weary for another minute's thinking, found rest in profound slumber.

One day, just before Punch's fifteenth birthday, he had stolen off with Jude to the woods with no other company than her former infant charge, now

grown to a little romping maid, who had already learned to tease Jude about Punch, which of course caused the hot blood to flush the former's cheeks, but it was not apparent, although the maidenly modesty inherent in the sex caused her much confusion, and frequently a stampede when strangers were present.

Arrived at a favorite and delightful nook by the side of the branch where they had waded when younger, little Nelly wandered off to explore on her own account the Land of Fairies about which she had heard so much from her mother, and found so much that coincided with the descriptions given by that famous story teller, that she forgot all about Punch and his sweetheart.

The two had talked of everything except that dearest to the heart of each, and after a while, following a long pause, Punch said:

"Jude, sum er des times I wan' ter lef' home, an' I mout not git er chance fer ter see yo', an' tur'r night I kep' thinkin', twel my haid mos' bus' op'n, 'bout whut I gwine do wid hit; an' den I say ter myse'f, 'yo' better gi' hit ter Jude, an' den yo' kin go whar' yo' please."

"Shucks, yo' ain' gwine nowhar', boy; an' whut dat yo' gwine gimme? I don' know whut yo' talkin' 'bout."

"Dat's er fac'. I's talkin' 'bout mammy's ring dat she gimme Chris'mus 'fo' she died. Heah hit."

Punch held in his tremulous fingers a small package wrapped carefully about with many strings; and he watched with dancing eyes and a quickened heart the girl as she slowly unwound the string and discovered the splendid ring, and with an exclamation of joy slipped it on her finger.

Punch, exulting with happiness, seized the girl in his strong arms and kissed her rapturously, and Jude, thinking he had gone to the extreme bounds of the modest requirements of a lover, cried:

"Stop dat, Punch! Yo' ain' gimme time ter draw

my bref," and with a playful slap on his swarthy cheek she disengaged herself.

"Jude, when I go 'way I wan' yo' ter keep dat ring es long es yo' live ter 'member me by. Yo' knows jes' es well dat I love yo' mo' 'n enybody in de worl', even ter Don. I thought I loved him mo' 'n enybody uver could love one nur'r, but shucks! dat warn' nuttin' ter yo'. I went thoo' water fer him onest, but I'd go thoo' fyer an' brimstone fer yo', gal! Jude, I love yo' I love yo'!"

Taking her unresisting hand in his, and pulling her toward him, her beautifully rounded bosom heaving like a soft billow with the intensity of love for her adored, she looked into his eyes a moment, her swarthy eyelids drooped, and she whispered, as if afraid even the birds would hear:

"Punch, I love yo'."

For a blissful moment they remained clasped in each other's arms, but in the intensity of enjoyment of their love they were oblivious to time and place. It might have been the space of a lifetime, so intense was their love for each other. Deep in the alder bushes was heard the twit of a bird, and as a brown thrush emerged therefrom, it burst into a thrilling song, that was as delightful to the ear as falling water.

"Hesh, Jude! Jes' lis'en at dat th'ush. De way dat burd sings he mus' be es happy es I is."

They did listen until the song was finished and the gentle minstrel had taken flight, after expressing in his own delicious music that which the language the two spoke was so utterly incapable of doing.

"Jude, I wan' yo' ter wyar dat ring jes' es long es yo' lives; an' sum er dese days I gwine ter mek yo' my wife, an' den I knows we gwine ter be jes' es happy es dat burd. I *knows* hit."

"Punch, I nuver kin love nobody lek I dus yo', boy. Yo' know I gwine wyar de ring 'dout' yo' tellin' er me. But 'sposin'—no, nummin' 'tain' nuttin'."

"'Sposin' whut?" asked Punch, seeing her puzzled air.

"I jes' gwine ter say, sposin' Aun' Viry see de ring an' tek hit 'way fum me."

"Humph, she ain' gwine do dat, I know; 'ka'se dat ring ain' nobody's but mine, an' she ain' got nuttin' ter do wid hit. Mammy gin me dat ring de ve'y time Unc' Jim gin hit ter her, an' she said hit gwine be mine arter she daid an' gone. De night she died Viry was de ve'y one dat tooken hit off'n her finger an' put hit 'way. Arter she got ma'ied she use' ter git hit an' war hit, an' dat made me mad, so one day I watched her put hit back in her chis', an' one day when hit twarn' locked I went in dar an' got hit, an' hid hit in er crack in de wall, twel tur'r day, when I thought 'bout yo'. An' I say ter myse'f, Jude wan' dat ring mo' dan I dus, 'ka'se I cyarn' wyar hit 'dout ruinin' hit. An' den I wan' yo' ter have hit 'ka'se I'se feared I'll lose hit, an' mos' 'ka'se I loves yo', gal."

The ring was formerly worn on the plump little finger of Polly, but Jude's little finger was so tiny that it would fall off, and the forefinger was the only one that would retain it. But would her fingers not grow? and what cared she if they didn't. Since Punch had given her the ring, she would wear it as a bracelet if need be. When she was alone she sat for hours rapturously admiring the glistening stones and the gold circlet, and dreaming of those days in future of blissful happiness with her beloved.

After her work was finished she would go to her room, and unlocking her chest take out the precious token, and slipping it on her finger would admire it and dream by the hour, or until interrupted in her reveries by Mrs. Morton. Then, hastily replacing it in its accustomed receptacle, she would get about her work with remarkable promptness and dispatch. This made Mrs. Morton wonder.

One day Jude had slipped on her ring as usual, and being busy about other things in the room had

neglected to remove it, and presently, having occasion to go to the kitchen, she saw Elvira coming up the yard, who, nodding, said:

"Good evenin', Jude. How yo' cum er long, gal?"

"Tol'able, Aun' Viry, how yo' do?"

"Po'ly, po'ly; dese men-folks 'nuff ter run yo' 'stracted, en whut dey don' do de chillun dus, an' dar 'tis. Lemme tell yo' Jude, dese men-folks is frauds, an' er pack er liars, de lars' single sol'tary one un 'em.

"Dey gives yo' fyar 'nuff promises 'fo' dey gits yo', but arterwa'ds dey treat yo' lek dey please, an' wu'k yo' ha'f ter deth, an' yo' don' git dat fer hit," snapping her finger emphatically.

"Yo' reck'n dat so 'bout all de men-folks?" asked Jude seriously.

"Reck'n, reck'n (with a high fling of her head), I don' reck'n nuttin' 'bout hit; I know dey is. Yo' kin shek the bes' un 'em in er bag ter'ger'r, an' de fus' cum out is jes' es good es eny, an' he is wuss'n de ole Scratch."

"Whut mek yo' talk so, Aun' Viry? Whut Unc' Jolin dun dun?"

"Shucks, he ain' dun nuttin' much, 'ka'se he ain' got sense 'nuff. I dunno which is wuss—er debble er fool. I know sumin' 'bout bofe. So de bes' way ter git 'long is ter keep jes' es fer fum 'em es de eas' is fum de wes'. Ef dey uver git yo' un' dey thumb, den yo's a gone chicken."

"I don' reckerlec' mammy sayin' nuttin' 'bout how mean dey wus," remarked Jude.

"Dat ain' nuttin'. Lis'n ter whut er fool tellin' yo', an' nuver git ma'ied ef yo' live ter be er thousan' years ole."

"But yo' sho'ly don' mean dat er good boy lek Punch gwine tu'n out lek yo' say?"

How much she wished she had not asked such a question, as she felt the hot blood rushing to her cheeks; but it was too late, and as she raised her

head in her confusion she saw the look of sarcastic hate upon the face of Elvira, that set the muscles of her face contracting until it became a study. Then she replied:

"Punch! Why Punch is one er de meanes', low-lif'tedest houn's—"

"Hol' on, Aun' Viry, I ain' use' ter lis'en ter sich talk es dat."

"Whut! Yo' li'l' wench, yo' mus' be 'bove hyearin' whut I got ter say.' Yo' li'l' lowlif'ted rogue, whar' yo' git dat ring on yo' finger? Hit looks jes' lek mine I los' long time ergo."

"No, no, hits mine, an' I wouldn't part wid hit fer nuttin'."

"Heah, jes' lemme look at hit. I ain' kwine keep hit, yo' li'l' fool."

With confidence Jude held out her hand. As she did so Elvira caught it in her grasp, slipped the ring off in a twinkling, saying:

"Yass, dis ring is mine. Knowned hit time I seed hit, an' I gwine see who gwine wyar hit now."

"Please gimme hit back, Aun' Viry; please, marm; I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd I heap ruther fer yo' ter do enything dan ter tek dat ring!" And the poor girl began to cry.

"Yo' de biggis' fool I uver see in my life, an' mus' think I is too, ef yo' think I gwine give yo' er ring yo' stole fum me."

"Stole!" cried the enraged Jude as she ceased crying, and the tears dried on her lids. "Yo' stan' dar lyin' lek dat, an' ain' fyeared er Gawd A'mighty strekin' yo' daid?" Yass, I say yo' lie ef yo' say I stole hit! Sumbody gimme dat ring ter keep, an' whut he gwine say when he fin' I ain' got hit?"

Again she resorted to tears and entreaty, but both were alike in failing to move the merciless woman to compassion.

"I don' keer how much yo' ryar an' charge, yo' ain' gwine git dis ring 'dout yo' 'ooman 'nuff ter tek hit, an' I sho' ain' fyeared er dat."

"Please, Aun' Viry, don' mek me bre'k my wu'd. I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd I wus gwine wyar dat ring es long es I live, 'ka'se dem de ve'y wu'ds I said ter Punch when he gin hit ter me," said the girl unconsciously betraying the name she sought to conceal.

"Punch? De debble yo' say! Did dat brazen debble Punch have de face ter gi' yo' dis ring, er is yo' jes' lyin' fer ter shiel' yo'se'f?"

"Whut I say is de Gorspel truf es sho' es I stan'in' heah, or I hope I may die!" declared Jude.

"Dat's ernuff, dat's all I wan'. I know yo' ain' gwine ter git dis ring now, not ter save yo' life. No, not ef yo' beg fer hit on yo' knees fum heah home. No, no, I ain' gwine give hit ter yo'! Now yo' knows hit."

Without more ado, Elvira set off home, walking very fast, and muttering maledictions on the unhappy Punch all the way.

Jude bore the affront with patience becoming her gentle nature, and beyond the one burst of anger, when her integrity was questioned, no one would have thought that she could have held herself in restraint under such trying circumstances. Beyond crying until tears ceased to flow, she attended to her duties as usual, nor did even Mrs. Morton discover her trouble, for during the altercation she was in a distant part of the house and heard nothing of it.

By the time Elvira reached home she was fuming with rage, and when Punch, tired with his day's work, slowly walked up to the yard, carelessly let his hoe fall off his shoulder in the fence corner, and had just taken the gourd off the nail preparatory to taking a drink of water, the rasping voice of Elvira called out:

"Punch, I wan' know whut yo' mean by stealin' dis an' givin' hit ter dat gal Jude fer? 'Tain' while ter say yo' didn', 'ka'se yo' did. Didn' she said yo' gin hit ter her?"

"Did she say I stole hit?" asked Punch, with as

little manifestation of the anger that was blazing within him as possible.

"No, she didn' 'zackly say dat, but—"

"Yo' lie! Ev'y wu'd dat cum out er yo' black th'oat is er lie, an' er black lie! She didn' gi yo' dat ring; I know dat well as I stan'in' heah. Gimme hit heah!"

Elvira, powerful woman though she was, overcome by the furious anger of the boy and his imperative command, momentarily forgot herself so far as to remove it from her finger.

Punch clutched it with the quickness of a hawk before she was aware. Quickly becoming sensible of her weakness, she tried to regain it, but he was too quick for her.

"Gimme dat ring, Punch!"

"Tain' yo' ring. Mammy gin me dis ring 'fo' she died."

"Gimme de ring," she commanded, looking about threateningly.

For answer he looked her straight in the eyes, clinched his teeth, and hissed through them:

"I wouldn' give it ter yo' ter save yo' life!"

This was the first time that Punch had defied her, and for a moment she was undecided, but quickly recovering her equanimity, she hastily broke a number of switches, and approaching him said:

"Tek dat shu't off."

"Whut yo' gwine do, Viry?"

"I gwine whup yo', dat whut I gwine do. Yo' gittin' too mannish heah lately, an' I gwine tek yo' down er button hole er two."

"Ain' nobody but daddy gwine whup me, Viry. Enybody dat tech me but daddy gwine git hu't."

This was too much for Elvira. Within the twinkling of an eye she had reversed her bundle of switches and had struck the boy a stinging blow across the face. The blood streamed from his nose, but without crying out the boy rushed into the house, seized a tobacco knife from the table, and

was rushing upon Elvira with demoniacal fury. His jaws were clinched and his eyes blazed in his madness.

"He'p, John; he'p! He gwine kill me! He'p, somebody!" cried the cowardly woman.

"Punch, Punch! Drap dat knife, seh! Whut dis mean? Tek dat shu't off, seh. I'll show yo' how ter draw er knife on enybody."

"Daddy—"

"Didn' I tol' yo' ter tek dat shu't off, boy? Why'n yo' min' me, den?"

Here John cut Punch a severe blow over the back, and the latter slowly removed his shirt and exposed his splendid shoulders and back to the lashes.

"Daddy—" again began Punch.

But his father would not hear him. Had he not had all the evidence he wanted? No excuse would be taken, so he curtly bid him to—

"Shet up, boy; I ain' gwine ter heah nuttin' yo' got ter say."

The boy stood still and received the powerful blows of his father without a sound escaping him, and after his back was a mass of welts his father ceased his punishment, saying:

"Punch, ain' yo' 'shamed er yo'se'f?"

"I ain' dun nuttin'," said Punch doggedly.

"Hesh, seh, and don' lemme heah yo' 'havin' lek dis ag'in."

"Yas, seh," responded the boy.

Punch gloomily ate his supper and went to bed, but did not sleep. At last everybody was in bed and the house quiet. When he was quite sure everybody was asleep he silently arose from his pallet, and taking the best suit of clothing he possessed, on his arm, which he had taken the precaution to hide before lying down, he quickly and without trouble found his way out of doors. Only old Nero was vigilant enough to know of his going away, and as the boy came out his old friend came up to

him in the faint moonlight, wagging his tail affectionately. The hot tears rained down the boy's cheeks, and stopping a moment to give the old dog a hug, and we are not sure but a kiss also, he arose to go, and as he did so said to himself, "I wish folks wus es good es dogs."

He went straight to the Morton's home to see Jude and say farewell. He knew her room, but the window was too high to reach, so he put a rail up against the house and climbed up and knocked at the window. This somewhat alarmed Jude, who had not yet gone to sleep, so troubled had she been about the ring, but going to the window she was surprised to find Punch.

"Hesh," said he.

"Whut yo' doin' heah, boy?" she asked.

"I cum fer ter bring dis an' fer ter say good-by," he said, slipping the ring upon her finger.

"Whut—why—whut de marter 'd yo', boy?"

"We-all dun had er fuss. Daddy wouldn' lis'n ter nuttin', an' he beat me. Dat 'ooman took dat ring fum yo' an' said I stole hit, an' den wan' ter beat me, an' I wouldn' let her. I ain' gwine stay in dat house er day longer!"

"Whar yo' gwine, den?" asked Jude.

"I dunno."

"Dunno whar yo' gwine? Whut yo' gwine do den?"

"I dunno. I gwine lef' dis part er de country, but I gwine let yo' know whar I is. Jude is yo' gwine wyar dat ring faithful, gal?"

"Nor, I ain' gwine wyar hit, but I gwine ter keep hit dis time sho', an' I hope I may die ef hit git 'way fum me ag'in."

"Good-by, den. Don' fergit me, Jude, an' ef yo' nuver heah fum me no mo', reckerlec' I loved yo' jes' es long es I lived."

They kissed and embraced each other, then Punch slid down the rail, and was going off, when Jude softly called:

"Punch, is yo' got eny money?"

"Nuh," was the reply.

"Heah, tek dis. I don' wan' hit," and she threw a knotted handkerchief to him, with her savings tied in one corner of it.

He picked it up, kissed it, put it in his pocket, and slowly walked away.

CHAPTER XIII.

PUNCH'S DEPARTURE.

Jude stood at the window long after Punch had disappeared down the hill toward the branch, and the more she thought of his abrupt departure the more forlorn and deserted she felt, and going back to her couch she took the ring that had been such a cause of contention and kissed it fervently saying softly to herself:

"He loves me, I knows he loves me, but now he dun gone er way, an' whut good hit gwine do ef he dus, when he ain' heah, an' I won't nuver see him no mo'. O Lawdy, whut I gwine do? Whut I gwine do? And a fresh flood of tears welled up in her eyes that would have been painful to witness. Then faith in him would make her say, with smiles amid her tears:

"Shucks! 'tain' w'ile fer me ter boder my haid 'bout Punch. He say he gwine ter cum back, an' he gwine cum, too, jes' es sho' es Gawd spyar his bref. He ain' nuver tol' me er lie yit, an' I gwine b'lieve him twel he dus." Alternately crying and smiling, she slept with the ring in her bosom.

Punch, probably thinking that search might be made for him when he was missed, thought it best not to pursue his journey by the public road for fear of being tracked, besides others might recognize him and tell his father, who would most likely come looking for him. Therefore he kept to the fields and woods, and sought to make his way to Cloverdale, where he could get on the train.

Nothing prevented this, because he was familiar

with the country, as he and Don had often hunted over the whole district several times. The only anxiety that he felt was that he might be pursued and forced to return to his former home, which, as he walked along, he vehemently declared to himself he would never do:

"I ain' nuver gwine back dar twel I'se my own man, an' den I jes' dar' enybody ter tech me; I jes' dar' 'em, dat's whut." And he clinched his fists emphatically.

"Dey ain' nuver treated me right since mammy died, an' ev'y chance dat 'ooman git she lay ev'ything on me, an' 'tain' one Gawd's bit er use ter say nuttin'. She gwine ter mek sich er fuss wid her big mouf, yo' cyarn' heah yo'se'f talk an' yo' jes' got ter stan' whut she say. I dun stan' hit long ernuff, an' now I dun lef' her, an' I sho' is glad un it.

"But I sho' hate ter lef' daddy an' de chillun, an' Jude, an Don, but es long es daddy is whar' dat 'ooman is, he ain' gwine ter lis'en ter nuttin'. An' it de bes' dat I lef' home, enyway, 'ka'se I mout git mad one er dese days an' kill dat 'ooman, an' den dar hits too late den ter think erbout.

"O Jude, my li'l' gal! How I gwine git erlong 'dout my li'l' Jude? Jude, I nuver knowed how much I loved yo' twel now, when I'se gwine lef' yo' fer I don' know how long."

The boy was now seized with a despondent spirit, and a sense of loneliness and of homesickness, that more than once caused him to stop and look back with longing upon the scenes of his childhood, now calm and peaceful in the beautiful moonlight. His pride and determination, that had characterized him from a child, prevented him from returning, and he walked more rapidly after each recurring temptation.

When the dawn appeared in faint streaks along the horizon, he sought a fence corner where it would be shady during the day, and went sound asleep, as if he had been on his pallet at home. In

fact there was little difference in the degree of softness between the two, and that difference was no great matter to him. Punch had left home without any preparation for a journey. He wore a shabby straw hat, a tolerable coat, a pair of coarse trousers, and a hickory shirt, and it being summer time he wore no shoes. When he awoke it was only a moment's work to souse his head in the first branch that he came to, and thus refreshed he picked some blackberries and green apples, with which he satisfied a rather rebellious stomach. When he arrived in Cloverdale it was early in the night. The stores had not closed, and being ravenously hungry after his day's fasting, entered one of them and asked:

"Got eny cheese?"

"Yes," replied the clerk, and as he recognized Punch he said to him:

"Hi, boy, what are you doin' 'way over here this time of night? I bet John will wear you out when he finds you."

"Huccom'?" he asked.

"He has been here looking for you ever since about twelve o'clock, and he just left about sundown."

"Dat so? Got eny crackers?" asked Punch.

"Yes."

"Gimme er poun' er cheese an' er poun' er crackers," he asked.

"What are you goin' to do with a pound of crackers, Punch? That will make a pile of 'em."

"Dat's whut I wan', 'ka'se I'se hongry."

"Where have you been all day, Punch?"

"I ain' bin nowhar', much."

"Didn't you know your daddy was lookin' for you?"

"Nuh."

"Well, he was, and he was mad, too; and said that if he found you he would give you the worst whippin' you ever had."

"Wus dat all he say he gwine gimme?"

"That's all I heard of," replied the clerk. "When are you goin' back home?"

"I dunno."

"Where are you goin' to-night?"

"Nowhar'," was the laconic answer.

As Punch ate his cheese and crackers he thought very little of his questioner and questions, but was wondering if he could ever get enough of the two dainties that he was at present consuming; and he had already concluded that if ever he could afford it, never should a meal be served him unless both of these appeared on the table.

"Well, Punch, it is time to close now," said the clerk as he began putting out the lights in the store, and fastening the windows.

"Waal," said Punch as he slid off a big goods box to the floor, "I mus' go," and with a good-night he disappeared toward the depot.

On entering the little station the simple country boy was trembling with excitement, and so softly had he entered the open door that the ticket agent did not hear him, for he was at the time engaged in taking a telegram, and as he looked up for a moment he coolly asked:

"What do you want, nigger?"

"Dis whar yo' git tickets fer ter ride on de train?"

"Yes. Where do you want to go?" asked the agent as he sealed and directed the telegram, and took up his ticket-book.

"I don' know, seh, yit; wait jes' er minit an' I'll tell yo'."

"Don't know where you are goin'? Well, you must be a fool. Where did you come from, anyway?"

Punch was known in the store, but the station-agent did not know him, nor did he care to, for that matter. This did not influence Punch's life one jot, for it did not matter in the least. In fact, Punch preferred to remain unknown for the remainder of

his stay in Cloverdale. So he replied to the last question:

"Nummin', seh; please, seh, gimme er ticket fur es dat 'l go," and he emptied the contents of his knotted handkerchief on the table, and timidly looked at the agent while the latter counted the numerous silver and copper coins. When he had finished counting he said:

"You fool boy, don't you know where you want to go?"

"Nor, seh."

"Do you want to go to Richmond, Danville, or the devil?"

"Nor, seh, I don' wan' ter go ter de lars' place, 'ka'se I 'spec' I gwine git dar soon 'nuff. Dat 'nuff ter pay de way ter Richmon'?"

"Yes, and you will have a dollar left."

"Gimme me one ter Richmon', den."

And as the ticket was written and handed to him, he asked:

"How long 'fo' de train?"

"It's due at 11:30, and you had better be awake when it comes, or you will be left."

"Thankee, seh," which was taken as a matter of course by the station agent, and he went back to his work: while Punch, securely pocketing his money, seated himself on the platform in the moonlight, and waited.

Regularly, at intervals of five minutes, he would get up to see what time it was, and he never at any time ventured fifty feet from the station, for fear of being left, and he felt for his ticket and money with painful regularity to see if it had been lost. Several times in the stillness of the night bitter tears had welled up in his eyes, and thoughts of home overwhelmed him; but with a manfulness that was exemplary he again and again overcame his monetary desire to return, and at last his determination had become so strong not to do so that it troubled him little, and he thought of other things.

When the train whistled for the station, how his heart beat with excitement; and his breath came in gasps when he looked at the blazing headlight as the engine swept by him with its hot breath that seemed infernal. When he was mounting the steps of the car he felt a thrill of exultation:

With a hissing whistle the air brakes released the wheels, and the engine, puffing vociferously, resumed its journey. So Punch began his first ride on the train.

The rhythmical rocking and the easy motion of the car, which would have been called abominably rough by an experienced traveler, was so novel and pleasant to the exhausted boy that he soon slept.

When he awoke the train was standing still and the car was empty, and a negro man in a blue uniform was standing over him, shaking him roughly.

"Say, boy, whyn't yo' git outer heah, dis cyar ain' gwine no furder.

"Whar hit now, den?"

"Dis is Richmon'."

"Whar mus' I go den?" asked the confused Punch.

"How I know whar' yo' mus' go? Yo' mus' ain' got good sense, is yo' boy?" asked the brakeman as he stared in surprise at the shabby boy who could ask "sich fool questions," as he remarked to a companion afterwards.

"Yo' jes' go out dat cyar do', an' foller yo' nose twel yo' cum ter de nex' street, an' go up dat."

"Seh?" asked Punch.

"Waal, I 'clar yo'se er fool an' yo'se deef, too. Ef yo' don' git outer dis cyar purty quick hit gwine tek yo' back ter Manchester. Yo' heah dat, don' yo'?"

The contempt felt by uniformed brakemen for country boys like Punch was supreme, and usually, in their presence, they did their utmost to impress them with a sense of their importance to the rail-

road's service, and of their exalted positions as employees thereof.

With awe, scarcely less pronounced than the brakeman's contempt for him, Punch felt so utterly insignificant alongside so great a personage that he felt more like returning to his simple country home than ever. Before the neatly-clad brakeman the boy presented a woeful sight, and nobody was more conscious of that fact than he, consequently his pride was wounded, and he was glad when he found himself out of the car and out of sight of the brakeman.

Never before in all his life had he seen such a crowd of people, nor heard such a noise, nor smelled such a variety of odors, and his head fairly swam with confusion.

If he stopped for a moment somebody jostled against him, or a truckman wheeling a heavy truck laden with trunks would yell to him: "Say, boy, git outer de way 'fo' yo' git runned over." And stepped nimbly aside he would knock against somebody who would mutter something about fool, and pass on. Wholly at a loss where to go or what to do, the boy passed into the crowd, and became absorbed in the insatiable maw of what to him was a great city, to become a mere atom that makes up the multitude of any city, and to forfeit all the beauty, freshness, pleasure, and innocence of country life in exchange for what? For a life of drudgery day in and day out, for artificial ugliness, for wickedness, and for the questionable society of people that envy and hate you. O Punch! if you only knew, for what you were exchanging your former life, and could see beyond the rosy horizon of youth, you would bitterly regret ever having left even the vixen Elvira and the blessed country.

When the crowd about the depot had dissolved away up Virginia Street, Punch followed, and soon found himself on Main Street, and again stopping for the want of something better to do, he looked

curiously up and down the busy street in wonder at the innumerable novel sights that attracted his attention. Presently the old feeling of loneliness and homesickness came over him, and, crossing the street he went behind a big store, and there, secure from curious eyes, concealed by packing boxes, he cried and cried. When he sought the street again he was much comforted, but, being unaccustomed to the city, he lost his way, and pursued his course along the quieter streets until he reached what he afterwards found to be Broad Street.

The cheese and crackers that he had bought the previous night had been consumed, and his boyish appetite provoked such hunger, that he thought the best business for the present would be to satisfy that.

Having never seen a restaurant, and, thinking all the stores like those in the country, he wandered into a dry goods shop, and asked for more cheese and crackers.

The clerk, with a wink aside at another, answered:

"We don't keep them; but you will find some across the street where the blue sign is." Which sign, by the way, was displayed by a hardware store.

"Thankee, seh," said Punch as he went out and inquired for his breakfast at the hardwareman's, who, seeing the joke, sent him in turn to a shoe store, where in turn he was sent to another store, until at last he came to the conclusion, as he muttered to himself:

"Dese heah sto's don' keep nuttin' whut folks wan'. Heah's I, jes' es hongry es er b'ar, an' cyarn' fin' nuttin' t' eet. Nummin' 'bout dat, I gwine fin' sum meat an' brade jes' es sho' es gun's i' on."

With eyes constantly alert for any evidence of food, he walked along the street slowly, and presently saw a sign roughly painted in black letters on a bright piece of tin, "Snacks an' Lodgin'." As he drew nearer, great dishes of luscious fried

chicken, a ham, and wheat bread in plenty was to be seen through the dingy window. For several minutes he stood looking at the tempting food before him, his mouth watering as thoughts of it, and the comfort its eating would bring, haunted him.

He had just made up his mind that he would have two or three pieces of the chicken, at least six of the biscuit, and several slices of the ham, even if it cost every cent he had, when a rotund, jolly-looking negro woman, seeing the boy pause so long, and thinking him a possible customer, appeared at the door and said to him :

“Whut yo’ wan’, son? Wan’ er san’wich?”

“I dunno whut dat is,” answered Punch.

“Hi, dunno whut er san’wich is? Dat’s brade an’ meat.”

“Yass’m, I sho’ dus wan’ sum er dat, ’ka’se I ain’ had nuttin’ ter eat since lars night; an’ Gawd knows I sho’ is hongry.”

“Cum in den, an’ les’ see whut yo’ wan’.”

Going in she made up and handed Punch a generously piled plate of food, and he tendered her his only dollar in payment. He received the change, and going to a table in the room he rapidly consumed every bit of the food. When through he replaced his hat on his head, for following the example of his father he had removed it when he began his meal.

With some hesitation he asked :

“Ef I cum back heah ter-night, kin I git er place ter sleep?”

“Yass, lodgin’s is fifteen cents er night.”

“How I gwine fin’ de place? I don’ know nuttin’ ‘bout dese streets an’ things, an’ dey all look jes’ lek ter me.”

“Heah, keep dis, an’ ef yo’ git los’ jes ax’ enybody, an’ dey ’ll tell yo’ whar’ Sally Brown keeps at.” With this, Sally handed him her business card.

Punch took the card, and, thrusting it into his pocket, said “Good mornin’,” and walked away.

To him, as well as to every other country boy who sees the city for the first time, there was so much novelty, so much that was so different from the quiet country, that it was like being transferred to another world. He wandered listlessly along the streets, his wide-open eyes staring in amazement at everything new, until after walking miles he stopped to rest and began to think what he had best do to earn a living. A simple calculation brought him to the conclusion that the money he had, would not last him more than three days at most, and after that what would he do?

The more he pondered over the problem, the more miserable he became, so at last he came to the following philosophical conclusion:

"Ef I ain' got no money, I cyarn' buy nuttin' t' eet, an' den whut I gwine ter do? I gwine starve, dat's whut. Waal, dat don' mek much diffunce nohow. Daddy allus did say I warn' good fer nuttin', an' hit mus' be er fac' 'ka'se heah I bin I don' know how long trompin' up an' down dese hot bricks, tryin' fer ter fin' sumin' ter do, an' ev'y time I ax' enybody fer wu'k dey look at me fer er minit, den dey grin an' say:

" 'Whar yo' cum fum, boy?'

" 'I cum fum de country, dat's whar I cum fum,' I say.

" 'Whut kin yo' do?'

" 'I kin plow, an' weed co'n, an' hill up 'barker an'—'

" 'Hol' on,' dey say, laffin', 'dis ain' er farm.'

" 'Co'se 'tain', I say.

" 'Whut kin yo' do heah,' dey say.

" 'I dunno, seh.'

" 'Nuh,' dey say, dey 'don' wan' enybody right now; cum back nex' week.'

"Dat's whut dey all say," dejectedly said the boy, aloud to himself, for he had this habit in common with his race, which is one of the negro peculiarities.

"Den whar' I gwine be nex' week? I mout be at

de debble fer whut eny dese folks in dis town keer. Nummin, I gwine wait twel de lars' cent gone, an' er I don' git sumin' ter do, I gwine stan' it long es I kin—den, den I gwine do sumin," he declared, speaking in an undertone to himself, as he stood on a shady corner on Broad Street, listlessly staring at the passing crowd without seeing any individual, so busy were his thoughts concerning his own affairs.

Suddenly a happy thought occurred to him—what a fool he was to forget Jude; how ungrateful he was to go away and hardly thank her, and her alone, for the means of leaving home; how anxious she must be to know if he was safe and well, so he determined to write.

Going into a store near by he bought a pencil, a sheet of paper, and an envelope. Some good fortune must have guided him, for he entered the right store, most likely by accident. Retiring to an alley, seating himself on a box, and using a loose board as a rest, he began, in the characteristic scrawl of a boy, the following letter:

"Richmon'

"Jun the six 18—

"Dear jude

i taik my sete, an' my pen in hand, ter infome you of my helth, I is well, an doin well an I hoape whin these few lines rech yo, Dat they will fin you the sam. Yo jest ort ter see Richmon, its a grate big place an yo kin se moar hier in er day than yo kin up thar in a year. Thats all jes now jude, I shore dus want ter see you and dats er fac. Giv my love ter daddy an all ceptin' dat ooman. No you betr not let em know whar I is but keep what I write secret and doan brethe er breth bout it ter nobody. good bye, wright soone to yo tru luv

"Jeems bruks

"P. s. dress you letters ter 850 eas' Brode Street
kear Mrs Brown Richmon va."

After finishing this letter, he enclosed it in the envelope, sealed and addressed it, then bought a stamp, and mailed it.

It will be noted that spelling was not one of Punch's strong points, for he never could remember for two minutes together how to spell any word, so he spelled them as nearly right as he thought they should be, and left the reader to find their meaning.

After occupying himself thus, his spirits rose, and again he sought work, but with no success. When the boy sought his lodging-house that night, and had paid for his supper and lodging, he was without a cent in the world.

With frankness one would scarcely expect, he waited until the dingy room was vacated by the boisterous and swaggering men and women who frequented the place, and then, being the last save the proprietress left in the room, he shyly approached her and said:

"Aun' Sally—dat is, Mis' Brown," he began, and his courage failed him.

"Whut yo' wan', son?" she kindly asked, and added: "Dat's de fus' time in I dunno when, dat anybody call me 'aun'.' Dat's right, yo' call me 'aun' jes' es much es yo' please, 'ka'se I ain' gwine say nuttin'. Dat shows yo' raisin'."

Encouraged thus, Punch began again, but his sense of utter homesickness and desolation, to which was added the kind words of his host, so overcame him that he could not refrain from crying, which he accordingly did.

Sally said nothing for a moment, but when he had regained his self-possession somewhat, she said:

"Hesh cryin', son. I know jes' whut marter 'd yo', jes es well es ef yo' dun tol' me wid yo' mouf. I dun seed too many lek yo' but mighty few un 'em got de feelin's yo' is. Yo' dun cum ter dis town, an' yo' money dun gin out. Dat whut's marter 'd yo'.

An' den yo' cyarn' fin' nuttin' ter do, an' yo' is low-sperited; ain't dat er fac'?"

"Who tol' yo' all dat?" asked the astonished boy.

"Nummin' 'bout who tol' me. Hit so, ain' hit?"

"Yass'm," he replied, much relieved.

"Now whut dus yo' wan', son? Lawd knows I ain' got much; but whut I got I kin do whut I please wid."

"I wus jes' gwine ter ax' yo' ef yo'—ef yo' would lemme sleep heah sumwhar' arter ter-night, 'ka'se my money dun gin out now. Ef yo' jes' lemme sleep on de flo', dat 'l do. An' when yo' git er crus' er brade yo' ain' got no use fer, an' will gin hit ter me, now an' den, twel I git summin' ter do, I jes es sho' pay yo' out de fus' money I git es I stan'in' heah."

"Dat's all right, son; dat's *all right*. Dat's de way I lek ter heah young folks talk. I dun seed long ergo yo' ain' one er dese no-'coun' niggers, an' 'fo' I let yo' eat er crus' I gwine beg fus'; dat's whut I gwine do. Yo' jes' mek yo min' e'sy 'bout dat, son; an' ef yo' don' do' nuttin' fer er munt' but try ter git sumin' ter do, I gwine treat yo' jes' de same es ef yo' paid me de hard money ev'y night."

With eyes brimming with tears the grateful boy held out his hand to take that of Sally's, and he said:

"Aun' Sally, yo' is de bes' frien' I got in dis gre't big town, an' I ain' gwine nuver fergit yo' long es I live. I spec' yo' wonder why I don't go back home, but ef yo' know'd jes' a li'l' 'bout dat 'ooman daddy got, dat would satisfy yo'. Den, too, I ain' got no money nur'r; but it jes' de same ef I had, 'ka'se I shamed ter go back home 'dout gittin' wu'k, 'ka'se I know Jude would allus be prodjikin' wid me ef I did. Dat's huccom' I wan' ter stay heah er buss."

When the boy turned to go to the miserable sleeping-room where he was to spend the night, he felt a sense of relief to his over-burdened mind that

was like balm, and he could not have been made much happier if he had been told of his sudden appointment to some well-paid position. Scarcely had he lain down in the ill-smelling and badly-ventilated room before he was asleep, which remained unbroken till morning.

"Dat's jes' whut er heap er dese country niggers dus," said Sally to herself as she closed up the eating-house and prepared to go to bed. Dey gits er dollar er two in dey pockets, an' cum trottin' ter town lek er parcel of blin' sheep, trapesin' up an' down de street wyarin' de bes' clo's dey got, an' Gawd knows dey ain' nuttin' ter be proud un. Fus' thing dey know dee money all gone, dey feel deyse'ves gittin' empty, an' heah dey cum runnin' ter git sumin' t' eet an' sumwhar' ter sleep, jes' lek us folks gwine live ter 'commode dem. Dey heap better stay whar' dey cum fum at fus'. When dey cum heah dey got ter wu'k, pe'ish, er steal, one tur'r."

Having spoken thus to satisfy herself in regard to the erring people whom she contributed to support by her labor and thrift, she shut the door with a bang of impatience and exasperation, as there recurred to her the innumerable times she had been imposed upon by her patrons. In banging the door she felt a fiendish delight in thinking it would be a pleasure to catch some of her former guests within the closing door.

CHAPTER XIV.

“NEVER SAY DIE.”

With a persistence born of a determination to find work of some kind, Punch set out next morning with a light heart and with a new-born effort. As he walked up the street the stores were just being opened, and as the business of the day was begun the sleepiness of the city was shaken off, and the eternal roar and bustle commenced.

The mist from the river had been dried up by the ascending sun that already made the trees and housetops glow in the warm light. The tinkling of the bells on the street-car mules' collars could be heard above the commingling noises, and made Punch fancy himself again at home listening to the tinkle of old Fanny's bell as she grazed in the clover.

Presently he stopped before a store where, displayed in the window, were two enormous bottles, as tall as himself, and filled with various-colored liquids. He was wondering what these were for, and what Don would think of such wonders, when a man came out of the store, and although neatly dressed, began to sweep off the pavement. Punch watched him until he could resist no longer, since it seemed to him so incongruous for a well-dressed man like that to be doing work that a boy could do. With some hesitation and timidity the boy approached him and said:

“Please, seh, lemme do dat. Yo' ain' fittin' ter git all du'tied up, an'I don' keer ef I dus.”

“Here then,” said the sweeper, as he handed the

broom over, and stopped to see how Punch did the work. So eager was the boy to find work that his hands shook, as he took the broom, and he began to sweep furiously.

"Hold on, boy; hold on! Don't sweep that way, you will get the store full of dust. Here, this is the way," and the man showed him how to sweep, and when he found he could do it satisfactorily, he went into the store to wait on a customer who had just entered. By the time the customer had been served, Punch had finished his task, and in the characteristic attitude of one accustomed to using the hoe, stood leaning on the broom, just as if it had been that implement.

"Finished?" asked the man, coming to the door.

"Yas, seh."

"Well, bring the broom in the store, for I have got something else for you to do."

Punch did go in, with alacrity, and in following behind his employer, who went through a maze of bottles, he came very near overturning several before he reached the back of the store. He escaped doing so, however, to his intense relief. He was first told to clean a quantity of dirty bottles, mortars, and curious glass vessels, altogether unlike any he had ever seen before. He set to work with a vim, but some of the vessels would not become clean, however much he tried to wash them. So going to his employer with one in his hand, he said:

"Dis heah thing ain' nuver gwine be no mo' use, 'ka'se I cyarn' git dis truck outer heah. I dun wash an' wash twell 'tain' no sense in washin', an' t'won' sile hit."

"Try this," said he to whom he appealed, as he laughed and poured into the graduate a fluid that licked up the troublesome stuff like flame. The boy looked at the graduate and then at his employer, who kept laughing, for he plainly saw the boy thought him a conjurer.

"Dat sho' is cuy'us truck. Look heah, Mis' Gem-

men, whut sorter sto' is dis enway. I nuver seed so many bottles since Gawd made me."

"This is a drug store. Didn't you ever see one before?"

"Nor, seh; dat I ain'. Whut yo' do wid all dat truck in dem bottles?"

"Sell it to people."

"Den whut dey do wid hit?"

"They take it."

"Tek hit! Swaller hit down dey th'oats?"

"Yes."

"Gre't Gawd! Dat med'cin', den, ain' hit?"

"Yes."

Punch gave a gulp, made a grimace as if he had swallowed some of the conglomerated mixture made of the contents of all the bottles, and went on with his work. When he had finished he went to his employer for further orders, saying:

"Dat all, seh?"

"Yes, I think so for the present. No, hold on. I want you to take this package out for me." And going behind the counter he gave the boy the package, saying:

"Do you know where No. — W. Grace Street is?"

"Nor, seh; but I kin fin' hit, do'."

"Well, take this up there and leave it for Mrs. Donnan. It is paid for."

"Yas, seh."

"Hold on, boy. What's your name?" asked his employer as he started out of the door.

"Dat so, I fergit ter tell yo' dat. Hit Jeems Brooks, seh."

"Where do you live?"

"I ain' livin' nowhar' jes' yit, seh. I jes' bo'din' down de street a li'l' ways."

"But what number?"

"I b'lieve hit No. 850 Eas' Brode Street."

"All right, hurry up and come back."

Punch set off with a feeling of responsibility he had never known before, and as is usual in such

cases, the novice that he was, went in the wrong direction, walked a mile out of his way, lost an hour's time, and did not discover his mistake until, going up to a man on the street, he asked him:

“Please, seh, tell me whar' dis place is.”

“About a mile up this street, that way,” pointing in the direction from whence he had come.

“Waal, I declar'!” exclaimed Punch. “Thankee, seh,” to the man, who nodded.

“Wonder dese folks ain' allus gittin' deysefs' los' in dis place, wid houses numbered dataway.”

Presently, arriving at the number wanted, he walked up and down several times before the house, then, as if afraid, he opened the gate gingerly, stepped on the porch, and tapped gently on the door. There was a bell, but he did not know what it was for. After tapping he stood waiting patiently, and surveying with admiring eyes the richness of the house, the beauty of the lawn and the surroundings, and felt extremely uncomfortable as he contemplated his own appearance, especially when he heard footsteps in the hallway, the door was flung open, and a voice said:

“Well, what is it.”

The boy was so busily engaged in considering the girl's beauty, that he so far forgot himself as to remain silent a moment too long, and she, seeing the bundle in his hand, held out her hand for it, saying:

“Do you want to leave that here?”

“Yass 'm,” he replied.

“Who is it from?”

“I don' know, 'm.”

“Don't know?”

“No, 'm.”

“It is a bottle, isn't it?”

“I reck'n so.”

“Julia,” called a voice from within, “who is that you are talking to so long?”

“I don't know, ma'am, nor does he look like he knows either,” was the response of Julia.

"Bring the package here, then, and let me see."

Julia took the package and disappeared.

"It is nothing but a bottle of medicine I told Mr. Thomas to send me when I was down town yesterday. Tell the boy it is all right," said Mrs. Donnan as she took the bottle from Julia.

"Yes, 'm."

Punch had waited on the porch until Julia returned, and as she appeared his heart gave a great bound as she said:

"That is right, the package is for Mrs. Donnan, and she lives here."

He looked up for a moment, their eyes met, and Punch hastily looked away again quickly, saying:

"Good-mornin', ma'r'm," and was gone.

The meeting of these two persons, whose lives in future would be so intimately associated together, was not remarkable; although the acquaintance was like to prove the undoing of Punch in the end.

Julia was not impressed otherwise than with the comical appearance of Punch, his stupidity and his dress, and both served to produce a laugh whenever he was thought of. When leisure permitted, she retired to the kitchen to tell the cook of the impressions made by the innocent fellow.

"You just ought to have seen him. There he stood, his mouth wide open, his eyes always movin', lookin' first at me, then down on the floor. His great big feet didn't have any signs of shoes on 'em; and such a hat, that hat would kill you, Betty. It looked as if he had slept on it for a week. I wonder where Mr. Thomas picked him up. I know he came from the country, for he looked just like it."

"Nummin' 'bout de country; whut ef he did cum fum dar. Yo' better wish yo' cum fum dar, den yo' 'd have sum manners," replied Betty.

When the products of the country, whether it was people, or vegetables, was assailed, a champion was always found in Betty, who so berated the unwilling assailant that he might have wished

heartily he had never said a word against the country, its people, or its products.

Betty had come from the country, and whenever opportunity presented itself she asserted most strenuously that the country was the only "fittin' place ter live."

It is unnecessary to give in its entirety all the controversy between the two; but we may add that it waxed to such a degree of warmth that Betty might have been heard to say in closing:

"Dar, ef yo' cyarn' hol' dat clapper er your'n, stay out dis kitchen, stay out! I ain' gwine ter heah nuttin' yo' got ter say when yo' mek fun er country folks lek dat. Fus' thing I know, yo' be mekin' fun er me, an' den I gwine brek yo' back 'fo' I know hit."

"You never will do any such thing," said the girl as she stepped up to Betty and snapped her fingers defiantly in her face.

A contemptuous "humph" on Betty's part was the only response to this token of defiance and they separated, Betty going into the yard, and Julia suddenly remembering she had something to do in a distant room.

The coldness existing between the two on account of this scene disappeared in a day or two, and they were good friends again.

But to return to Punch. His impressions were far different from Julia's. As he walked back to the store the beauty of the girl, the liveliness of her face, and the soft sweetness of her voice enchanted him. Youth though he was, he felt her influence, and the desire to love and possess as his very own such a creature. But along with the impossible desires and imaginings recurred to him the fact that he was literally a nothing in the world, a poor, barefoot, starving boy, that was living because nobody thought him worth killing.

"Nummin'," said he to himself as he mused, "I don' keer ef I is po', an' ugly, an' bar'footed, I kin look at her ef I cyarn' git her. Dat sho' ain' gwine

hinder me. 'Ka'se I kin look at de sky, an' moon, an' things 'dout havin' un 'em."

The boy would scarcely have permitted himself to utter his thoughts aloud had he not been certain nobody could hear him. Never before had he seen such bewitching beauty in woman, and nobody could blame him for forgetting his errand in his admiration of her, nor for feeling abashed at her sudden appearance at the door, which Punch was scarcely prepared for.

By the time Punch reached the store Mr. Thomas himself had come, and as the boy entered the store he felt that he had been gone a very long time, and he had some misgiving as to whether his long stay would be tolerated by Mr. Robin, for it was he who had sent him on the errand. He was manager of the store, and virtually did all the work, except that done formerly by the predecessor of Punch, who had unluckily fallen a victim to the bad habit of appropriating to his own use goods not his, and had been summarily dismissed, with a warning.

"Whut else yo' got fer me ter do, seh?" asked Punch, after he had waited what seemed too long a time before being noticed.

"Where have you been, boy? I thought you were lost, you staid so long."

"Dat's jes' whut I dun—got los'; but I foun' de place jes' de same."

"That's all right then. Now tell me where you are working."

"No whar', seh," promptly replied Punch; "dat's whut's de marter now, I ain' got nuttin' ter do. I bin heah Gawd knows how long, an' look lek I cyarn' fin' nuttin' ter do."

"Where did you come from?"

"I cum fum up in de country, seh."

"What did you do up there?"

"I wu'ked on de farm."

"Why did you leave the farm?"

"Jes' 'ka'se."

"Because what?"

"Jes' 'ka'se I didn't git treated good."

"Did you run away?"

"Yas, seh."

"Did you steal anything, or do wrong to cause you to run away?"

"Nor, seh; dat I didn'. En ef yo' don' b'lieve me jes' ax'— I ain't got nobody ter ax'," said he stopping short for want of a witness to authenticate his statement.

"Oh, never mind if I don't believe you. I will soon prove if you are any account. Do you want to live here?"

"Yas, seh," quickly replied Punch, with eyes overflowing with gratitude as he stood there nervously handling his hat, which he had twisted into a compact roll for at least the fiftieth time. He was the impersonation of contentment.

"How much will you work for?"

"I don' know, seh; jes' gimme jes' whut yo' think is right, an' dat 'll do."

"Very well, come back here then and I will show you where to sleep," said Mr. Robin, leading the way through several darkened rooms back of the store, where row after row and tier after tier of sombre-looking bottles glared down at the boy like so many specters. The two presently come to an ill-smelling room, darker than the rest, also filled to overflowing with bottles, except in one corner, where a stout iron bedstead could be distinguished in the gloom, for the beneficent rays of the sun never shone in the room.

There was a fireplace, but it had a deserted look, and was filled to repletion with waste paper, more bottles and rubbish.

"You can sleep here, Jim," said Mr. Robin, "and when I get up in the morning I will call you. Where are your clothes?"

"Heah dee," replied Punch as he pointed to the suit he wore.

"Are these all you have?"

"Yas, seh."

"Well, the first thing is to get you fixed up. Come on with me and we will see if a better suit can't be found."

Mr. Robin took Punch into a near-by store and bought a complete suit for him, and bidding him to bring it, he told him to put it on after getting to the store.

Punch did this without loss of time, and when his toilet was complete he felt so proud of his fine feathers that he could scarcely do his work. How uncomfortable he felt at having to work when fixed up so, for never in his life had he been dressed so well. And he wondered how city people could stay so constantly. He heroically endured the torture of his new shoes and the stiffness of his suit until bedtime, when he doffed them with a sigh of relief.

When the hour for dinner arrived, he set out for his former lodging-house to get his, and as he passed along he could not resist the temptation to look at himself in the polished glass windows.

After dinner was over, Sally said:

"Jim, guess whut I got fer yo'," as she held something behind her in her hand.

"I don' know, 'm, whut 'tis, 'ceptin' 'tis er letter."

"Dar, yo' got hit fus' go," and the good woman gave him a letter and stood watching him open it.

Being the first he had ever received in all his life, his curiosity was naturally aroused as to who could have been the writer, and he said as he turned the envelope over and over:

"Wunder who dat ben writin' ter me. I don' know nobody kin write lek dat."

"Whyn't yo' op'n hit, boy. How yo' gwine fin' who hit fum ef yo' don' op'n hit. Op'n hit."

Following her advice, he clumsily tore open the letter, and a limp green object fell to the ground, and Sally stooped to pick it up and found it to be a note for five dollars.

"Dar, I said ter myse'f hit sumin' in dat letter, 'ka'se hit er register. See, dat whut yo' tell by," said she, pointing to the stamp. "When yo' git er letter wid all dem stamps on hit, an' de pos'man mek yo' mek sum marks wid er pin 'fo' he gin hit ter yo', hit sho' gwine be sumin' in dar. Who dat fum, Jim?"

"Tain' fum nobody much."

"I know better'n dat. Humph, yo' mus' think I ain' got good sense. Dat letter fum er gal. Yo' cyarn' fool me, boy. Heah," said she as she handed him the money he had dropped.

Jim felt the blood mantling to his cheeks, and an itching sense of warmth that pervaded his body that was by no means pleasant. In plain words, he blushed furiously, and he was so confused that he passed out of doors to read his letter in private.

The reader has already guessed from whom the letter came. It was from Jude, and was written at the earliest possible moment after the one written to her had been received.

There is no accounting for this unwarranted hurry, but the fleetest trains, or birds of the air, are too slow when messages such as these are to be transported.

The profound love of the young girl for the boy quickened her into answering his letter so soon, and to prompt her to send him every cent she possessed. Luckily she had been paid the day before. Spelling each word over slowly, Jim read as follows, and every word of endearment sent a thrill through him:

"Cloverdal va
"jun the 15. 18—

"dear Punch

"unc johne jus' now brout Me de letter You
write me turther day, an i take my sete, an my pin
in han, ter let you know how we wus. We all is

well and doin well, and when yo git dis I hoap it will fin you well. We all glad ter heah yo gittin long so well. Punch I gwine sen in dis er 500 five dollar note. I wish I had moar ter sen my litteel boy, but it all I got ef I gwine ter be hung. I know whut yo gwine say, an' dat is i de bes gal in de worl, but I knowse I ain' fur dat ain nuttin, senin er little mony to yo, kase I ain got no ust fer it and yo mit need it was en I dus.

"Unc' john sho did rais er racket arfter yo lef an' he an Viry jes quar'ld an quar'ld 'twill I thought sho dey wus gwine fight one nurr. She look lek she glad yo wus gone, and dat jus whut made unc' johne so maid, I ain tol em yit whar yo is an I ain gwine ter nurr. Kase I know unc' johne wud cum arfter yo er break er trace.

"Don dun cum home an he sho did cry when he foun' yo dun leff but I ain tol him whar you wus nor I ain gwine to never, kase he can' keep nuttin ter save his life.

"Don alwaiz up ter sum er his projics, but he sho does mis yo.

"Ol fanny got er cafe, and you all ol Sow got sum pigs.

"Punch whean you Gwine come hom, I mis you mo and moar evy day but I looves yo de same Punch.

"Write son, and lem me heah how you git er long Yo tru luve.

"JUDE.,'

With bedewed eyes Jim put his letter away, and going into the lodging-house said to Sally as she went behind the rude counter:

"Heah, Aun' Sally, tek whut I owe yo' outer dis."

"Dat's all right, son. Ef dat all yo' got yo' better wait twel yo' git mo' fo' yo' spend' dat. I ain' in no hurry."

"Yass, I know yo' bin mighty good ter me, Aun' Sally; but I dun gone ter wu'k now, an' I mout los' it, an' yo' better tek hit."

"Whar yo' git wu'k, son?"

"Up de street 'n er drug sto'."

"I sho' is glad," said she.

And Punch returned to work.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRANGER.

A few months after Punch had been engaged in the drug store he had gained the confidence of his employer and Mr. Robin, for both seemed to like the cheerful, good-natured, and obliging boy. So devoted did he become to Mr. Robin, that if he had seen fit to call him out of bed in the middle of the night to go somewhere, he would have done so without a word of complaint. The loungers about the store were frequently given to prodding Punch concerning his country ways and his pronounced dialect, which he also became aware of to that degree that he almost ceased speaking while in the store, until he had learned better English from those whom he heard speak. His proud nature could not bear to be taunted, and several times his hot blood came very near causing an explosion that would have injured his prospects, probably; but his self-control prevented the outbreak, and discretion prevailed.

He was a mark for the practical joker that is the abiding nuisance about a drug store, and many times had he been the cause of laughter among the loungers there, whose shouts had made the bottles dance. He bore with characteristic equanimity these endless pranks, and often laughed at them himself.

As city life became more familiar to him, Punch liked it the more. He liked the business, the bustle, the noise, the constant change of scene; and when he came to know Mr. Robin better he would relate

to that gentleman, much to his amusement, many accounts of happenings that never found their way into the newspapers.

The brief period of a few months had been quite enough to materially alter his general appearance, which was for the better, and for some unknown reason he paid more attention to his dress than his position in life seemed to warrant. In vain did he try to get his stubborn hair to remain parted in the middle as he had seen the hair of the barber on the same square do, yet in its perversity, after weeks of training, a day of neglect would cause it to relapse into almost as intricate a tangle as a virgin forest.

His predilection for pomatum, cosmetic, and perfume caused his sleek skin to look like it was varnished. The cosmetic served somewhat to keep the hairs of his head adhering and straightened, and the perfume, for which he possessed by no means the quality of a judge, he sprinkled upon himself indiscriminately from every bottle that was put aside as empty, until he smelled like a field of new mown hay, a bed of violets, a lilac hedge, commingled with odoriferous whiffs from the redolent pomade with which he had anointed his face. So utilitarian had he become in his habits that he never washed out an empty perfume bottle without first shaking the remaining drops upon his coat, lest it be wasted, he would say.

Many times during the course of his stay in the drug store had he been sent to take packages to Mrs. Donnan's, and each time, with one exception, he had been met at the door by the incomparable, the superb Julia; and the exception was when Mrs. Donnan happened to be on the porch and received the package in person, to Punch's lasting annoyance and disappointment. Then he had gone away dejected and forlorn, for he missed seeing her.

In a day or two he so far forgot himself as to ask :

"Mis' Robin, wan' me ter tek enything ter Mrs. Donnan?"

"No."

Then he asked the same question again before night.

"No, Jim; why? What do you want to take packages there for?"

"Humph, I didn't say I wan' tek enything dar, I jes' ax'd yo', jes' so; dat's all."

He breathed a sigh of relief when he found that he had not betrayed himself.

One morning Punch was sweeping out the store, and Mr. Robin had gone out for a moment, when a young man came in and said:

"Here, give me five cents' worth of salts. I've got to catch that car."

"Wait er minit twel I call Mis' Robin."

"I can't wait, you get it for me."

"I dunno whar', nur whut 'tis."

"In a drug store and don't know what salts is?"

"Nuh, I dun tol' yo' dat er r'ady."

"Where did you come from?"

"Dat ain' none er yo' biz'ness whar' I cum fum."

"I know you came from the country, but where?"

"Yass, I cum fum de country, an' whut yo' got ter do wid 'tis?"

"Don't get mad. I don't care where you came from, so you get me the salts, and let me go. Call the gentleman that stays here."

Punch went to the door and called Mr. Robin. He came in and served the customer, who paid his bill and hastily left the store.

Punch paused an instant in sweeping to gaze after him as he walked away up the street, and he could not help but admire the erect carriage, the good dress, and the general unapproachableness of the disappearing figure.

Oh, Punch, how unfortunate was the day that brought this person in contact with you. How many times in the future will you bitterly rue the

unlucky star that brought you face to face with one as incomparable for his treachery, vileness, and depravity as for his personal comeliness, education, and ability.

Punch did not, of course, know his name, but his face was not to be forgotten, and Punch therefore remembered it without much effort.

Still Lawson, it was, who had just entered the store and bought the salts, and left in such a hurry.

His brief intercourse with Punch had a peculiar effect upon the boy, for after that day he affected his superior air, his erect carriage, and even went so far as to attempt to copy his manner of speech; but his piping voice, not yet gone quite through the transmogrifying "goslings," sounded so ridiculous, even to himself, that he desisted.

How necessary in this impressionable period of our lives is a skilful master, a well-balanced mind, and a mould without flaw to secure the modeling of a character. All of which Punch unfortunately did not have to direct him, so he drifted, and fell, soft wax, into the hands of a very devil.

There are some persons who possess over others a peculiar mesmeric influence which by some mysterious agency permits them in a measure to hold over their victims sovereignty that the unwilling victim would be gladly rid of, but owing to circumstances over which he has no control he blindly follows.

Still, at the time of Punch's acquaintance with him, was about eighteen or nineteen years of age. He was tall and straight, and being the progeny of a white man and a woman of not too savory character, he was so nearly white that he might readily have passed anywhere, except where he was known, as such.

The commingling of the races had been unfortunate, for it perpetuated in the young man the vices of his father and the depravity of his mother, who herself was of mixed parentage, and consequently

had inherited all that was vile, and apparently none that was good, either from her father or her mother. One does not long wonder, then, to what depth the degeneracy of the races went when Still began his career.

As a child he had been brought up amid dirt, slovenliness, shame, and debauchery, and when other children were being schooled in morals and books, he was becoming familiar with the newest ribald song or learning some new word in his already fast-growing vocabulary of anathemas.

Being luckily left an orphan by his mother destroying herself after days of drunken debauchery, he had at the age of eight been drawn from his miserable surroundings by an aunt who pitied him. This good woman possessed several children as black as she to support, and could ill afford to feed and clothe him, yet she did so.

He sold newspapers for a living, and as he was as industrious as he was quick in acquiring knowledge of all sorts, whether good or evil, he managed to get on very well without being a great burden to his foster parents.

When he had grown older he was sent to school along with his sable cousins, but his superior intellect outstripped the less brilliant minds of even his seniors, and he was quoted as an oracle at home and at school. The flattery of his teachers, when his lessons were so well recited, caused him to look upon the majority of his school companions as blockheads, while he was thought a prodigy by them.

In due course he finished his career in school, and taking a high mark at graduation he began life as messenger in a bank owned by negroes. His friends predicted a brilliant career for him. It was soon after entering upon his duties in the bank that Punch became acquainted with him. As he passed back and forth by the store several times daily, to his meals, he used to call to Punch:

"Do you know what salts is yet?"

To which Punch would reply:

"Yass, co'se I dus."

Then he would stop and begin talking in his fascinating way, that charmed the admiring boy, and he felt highly honored: so presently he came to like Still very much. It was not long before the intimacy between the two had become so pronounced that they were seen together whenever disengaged from their work.

The boy from the country could scarcely help admiring the fine-looking fellow that spoke so correctly, who wore such good and well-fitting clothes, and who, strange as it may seem, sought in him a companion almost to the exclusion of others. That Punch was proud of possessing his intimacy and confidence we cannot doubt, for he was proud that he belonged to the same race, and prouder still that such a splendid fellow had negro blood in his body.

Still Lawson, at the time he made his appearance in this tale, was a stalwart young man, well dressed, and possessing an air of confidence in himself which made him disliked by some who knew him. He was about medium height, well proportioned, and strong. His face was particularly to be noticed. None but those familiar with the negro race would have thought him other than a bronzed Italian or Greek until he had spoken, for his hair was just the least bit curly. As for his face—the jaws were square, the lips thin, and when closed the mouth was a thin line; the eyes were as black as night, and gleamed like jet when their owner was provoked; the nose was rather narrow, and showed a sharp profile. His ears were small, far too small for so large a head, and his brow rather slanting, but broad, and marked by very black eyebrows. No beard had yet grown on his lip.

Whatever his motive was in cultivating the friendship of Punch is not known, and many remarked concerning his very queer taste. Yet he

was allowed to indulge his liking without further comment. One day when they were together, Punch, who had all along felt his inferiority, said to Still:

"Still, how yo' ly'arn ter talk so good?"

"I went to school. Why?"

"Ka'se I wan' ter ly'arn ter talk lek dat."

"Well, you can."

"How, how?" asked Punch eagerly.

"Go to a night school, that's how you can learn."

Punch thought awhile, then said:

"Dat's so, but whar' dey?"

"I know where several are."

"Dus yo'? Waal yo' jes' de one I'se huntin' fer."

"But you will have to buy books, and pay for your tuition."

"Pay fer books an' whut?"

"Tuition."

"I dunno how much dey gwine cos'. Is I 'bliged ter have whut de lars' yo' call?"

"Yes."

"Look lek books and sumbody ter ly'arn yo' whut's in 'em is 'nuff 'dout de lars'. Dat's all Don uver dun."

"Who's Don?"

"He jes' a white boy I uster run wid in de coun-try."

"Oh," said Still, "so somebody has been teachin' you already then?"

"Yass, Don ly'arn't me how ter read an' write er li'l' bit, but I wan' ter go ter school sumwhar' whar' I kin ly'arn mo'n dat."

"Very well then," said Still, "I know of a private school where you can go after your work is over here, if that is not too late. What time do you leave the store?"

"Bout seben er'clock."

"That's all right; you come around to my house to-night after you get off, and I'll take you there, and have your name put on the roll."

"Whar' I gwine git books, an' de tur'r thing yo' call—I fergit whut 'tis."

"What, tuition?"

"Yass, dats hit."

"Why, that is what you pay the teacher."

"Oh, yass, I didn' un'erstan' yo' at fus'," replied Punch, vainly trying to conceal his ignorance.

"You can buy your books after seeing the teacher, so be sure to come when you leave the store, and I will be ready."

With patience Punch waited until the hour when he usually left the store, and asking leave, at last he was on the street, and every step taken in the direction of Still's home appeared to be so many strides toward the ultimate goal—that is, an education.

Still, according to promise, took him to a good private school kept by Capitola Johnson, on Jackson Street, where, in addition to the day classes which she taught in one of the negro public schools, she added to her income by holding a night class, and a number of children who were obliged to work during the day found a means of learning in this way.

Still himself had been one of her pupils, and upon entering the room where the children were at work he asked to speak to her a moment.

"Good evenin', Miss Capitola," said he.

"How'dy, Still; why, I haven't seen you in a long time; how do you do; I am glad to see you. Who is this you have brought with you?"

"This is Miss Capitola Johnson, Jim; and this is James Brooks, Miss Capitola. I have brought this young man here for you to polish up some, Miss Capitola. He has never been to school, and knows barely how to read and write. So do your best for him."

Punch did not say a word, but merely went through the introduction with an awkward bow, and sincerely wished himself for the moment back

at the drug store. He felt the hot blood mantle into his face again, because the eyes of the school were on him.

His would-be teacher asked him what books he had studied, and he told her, and after a short talk suitable arrangements were made for his future attendance upon the school. He was to come the following night and bring the necessary books. After this he and Still departed.

In later years, when Punch awakened to a knowledge of the true character of Still Lawson and his execrable name was a loathsome one to his ears, and when his own life had been so nearly forfeited for the sins of this infamous man, his generous nature would not permit him to forget this one act of kindness on the part of one who had descended from the exaltation of a god to that of an arch fiend in his estimation. Often did he try to forget the wrongs done him by this one-time friend and to think of him only as he was when he first knew him, but he could not.

The life of Punch after he entered school was similar to thousands upon thousands of other boys who had no better advantage; and the probability is that the want of this advantage was the very thing needful in our hero to stimulate him to exert himself into emulating Still, who had long boasted of securing his education himself. What hard work he found it, this going to school, and how his animal nature rebelled at the close confinement night after night; but the boy was determined, and though he gained knowledge slowly and laboriously, he rarely forgot that which he learned, as we have already noticed.

The children used to laugh at his quaint dialect, and the consequence was he soon dropped his careless manner of speech, so that we shall scarcely be able to recognize the speech of him we had known a year or two before.

There were certain words that he never could get

quite right in his mind, even if he tried ever so hard. So "are" became "air," "stars" "stairs," and "boil" "bile," until his teacher tired of correcting him, and he is probably misusing the words at the present moment for aught we know to the contrary.

During the day Punch was busy about the store, and since he had the good sense to attend to his business, he was a general favorite with those who made a rendezvous of the store, and with Mr. Robin in particular. He came to like this gentleman almost as well as he had Don, he sometimes thought. But the mutual confidences exchanged between boys, and the delightful companionships begun in childhood are more lasting than life itself. Punch came to realize years after, that no friend existed upon earth more true than the companion of his childhood.

Punch had the happy faculty of making the most of life, and of snatching scraps of comfort while the rest of the world clattered by in the mad rush for wealth and supremacy. It is true that he worked hard, that is, hard for him, for very few of his race are capable of the long-continued mental strain of the Anglo-Saxon. In fact, some nights when he was kept at the store later than usual, he would get out his books and begin studying, but the warmth of the stove would soon cause him to nod, and the book would fall. The noise of falling would cause him to awaken, and snatching the book up wrong side up, he would attempt his task again, when the words would all run into each other and the page would become blurred with wonderful visions of Julia or Jude, so that to go on would be an impossibility, and he would permit himself to dream and dream. Then the prosy talk of some customer with whom Mr. Robin was engaged would cease, and he would go out, and the lull would probably arouse him, and he would set vigorously to work cleaning up.

Then what glad news greeted his ears when he

was told to go out and get some oysters and crackers. His eyes were wide open in a moment, and he was gone in a twinkling upon his errand, for he liked few things in the world more than an oyster stew, although a few months before it had been a task to even induce him to taste it. He had never seen oysters before coming to town, and they were as much a stranger to him as coal was. At home the sole fuel was wood. Wood was burnt at home, at the store, by the locomotives—consequently he had never seen it until he came to town.

One cool morning, during his first year in the store, he was told to make a fire in the stove. Going down in the cellar he began breaking up some packing boxes, and after awhile he ascended with a quantity in his arms, and began making the fire.

"Get some coal, Jim; that won't do," said Mr. Robin.

"Yas, seh."

Punch disappeared, with a perplexed air, but presently reappeared.

"I 'clar 'fo' Gawd, ain' no col' down dar, Mis' Robin."

"I know there is," said the now irritated Mr. Robin as he went to the foot of the stairs to show where the coal was.

"There it is," pointing to the coal.

"Whut, dem black rocks? Dat ain' col' dat yo' bu'n, sho'ly."

"Yes, it is."

"Waal, seh, I nuver hyearn er folks bu'nin' rocks b'fo'."

Bring that scuttleful up, and make a fire quick."

"Yas, seh."

The coal was carried up and Punch began to light the fire. He lit two or three splinters with a match, and having permitted them to burn to a coal, he took two lumps of coal and blew upon the whole furiously, just as he had been accustomed to do at home; but no fire resulted, and he was wondering

if Mr. Robin had not made some mistake, when that gentleman appeared on the scene somewhat out of temper, because he was cold. When he saw Punch's perplexed and begrimed face, and his preparation for fire making, he could not forbear a smile, but said:

"I see you never saw coal before, much less made a fire of it. Here, let me show you," and he made the fire, while Punch wondered. The oysters being brought, Mr. Robin himself cooked them on the stove, and after eating as many as he wanted, he called Punch, whom he had set to watch if a customer came in. Then such a feast as was left to him as he sat by the fire with the partially filled evaporating dish on his knees. He filled himself to satiety, and wondered what people did, or how they existed before oysters were found to be good to eat. The store cat looked up longingly at him, blinking his eyes slowly, and probably wondering if Punch would *never* be done with that dish.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INNOCENT SUFFER.

Since Punch's departure, Jude had been so different that everybody noticed it, and in spite of her effort at concealment, Mrs. Morton more than once heard her sobbing outright, and had asked what the matter was.

"Tain' nuttin' much. I jes' feelin' sorter po'ly, dat's all."

"If you are sick, Jude, you had better go to bed, and I will send for Dr. Young."

"No'm tain' while ter do dat. I ain' po'ly much; I'll be all right pres'ny."

Then, hastily dashing the tears away, she would go about her work with such energy that she would make all believe she was doing her best to dispel the grief and loneliness at the absence of the boy she loved so well.

When the letter had come from Punch announcing that he was "well and doing well," she did not much believe the statement, since she knew it was one of the forms used in writing letters, especially by those of her race who were wanting in original expression, and knowing this she wondered if it could be true, that he was doing well. We all know that it was not the truth, for at the very time of writing those lines he was spending all the money he had.

Jude, upon receipt of the letter, chuckle it in her pocket without even so much as taking the pains to look at it. But oh! how her little heart fluttered, and how suddenly absentminded she became, as Mrs.

Morton discovered her putting her cream pitcher, filled with milk, upon the stove instead of the coffee-pot.

"Why, Jude, are you crazy? Take it off this minute!"

"Waal, seh, I knows I gwine crazy," said the girl as she sheepishly corrected her mistake, and laughed as heartily as if somebody else had been to blame.

Oh how anxious she was to see the contents of that letter! Could it really be from Punch? No, he had not been away long enough yet to write, and besides he might never write. And then she became gloomy in a moment.

When the supper table was cleaned off and she was alone, she took the letter from her pocket and slowly opened it. She looked for the name at the bottom, saw it was from Punch, and with a cry of delight she kissed it again and again, and buried her face in the bedclothes, uttering humble thanks to God that he was indeed alive and well. Then reading the letter through, she kissed it again and placed it in her bosom.

Before she went to bed that night she knew the letter by heart, but still she read it daily, because it reminded her of Punch. Feeling sure that Punch had not told all concerning himself, and that he must need money, she took the liberty of sending him her whole month's wages entire, which luckily had just been paid her that day.

The first opportunity that presented itself she began the composition of a letter to him, and while consuming several hours in its writing, it was at last finished and ready for mailing. There was the difficulty. How could she mail it without anybody about the house knowing where Punch was? She thought and thought, and after a deal of tribulation she decided to take it to the post-office herself rather than trust the secret of Punch's whereabouts to anybody, even to Don. So at night she slipped away, and walked the two miles to Giff Gaff, the

nearest post-office, and cautiously put her letter in the box without being seen, and chuckling to herself at the clever ruse she had adopted, she was at home and in bed before she was missed.

Don, on his arrival from the school, just a few days after Punch's abrupt departure, had not been informed of that fact, and the very first inquiry, after greeting his parents, was:

“Where's Punch?”

“Why, Punch left very mysteriously a few nights ago, and we have no idea where he has gone.”

“Shucks, mother, I know you are jokin'. Where could he go? He never rode on a train in his life.”

“Yes, I know that; but he has gone, and his father found that he went as far as Richmond, because the depot agent told him so. I have not had the opportunity to write you since he left, and that is why I have not told you. John said that the agent told him that Punch, or at least a boy that answered his description, came to buy a ticket the night after Punch's disappearance, and he told him, further, that the boy was very anxious to go somewhere, and he told also of his offering five dollars for the ticket which he sold him to Richmond.”

“Well, mother, you haven't told me yet why Punch ran away?”

“I don't know, my son, unless it was because Elvira treated him so badly, and I am very certain that this was the cause, since he has run away.”

“I'm mighty sorry. I said somethin' would happen before I got home. I could break Elvira's neck! A good for nothin' woman; she did it, I know she did. I have seen Punch when his back was a mass of welts, and he has begged me never to tell anybody, and I did as he asked me; but now I wish I hadn't, and that Elvira had run away instead. Never mind, I am goin' to tell her what a mean, vile thing she is just as soon as I see her.”

“No you won't, Don. Elvira has a quick temper, and she might do you harm. Never say a word

• about this affair of Punch's to her, and have little to do with her. Her influence has changed even John, so that he is no longer the man he was; so be cautious, my boy."

"She won't hurt me," said the confident fellow as he went to his room. "Hello, Jude. Where have you been ever since I came? What'd you let Punch run away for, you scamp?"

"Howd'y, Don. I ain' bin nowhar' 'ceptin' yo' room."

"Plague take the room! What did you let Punch run away for, heh? What'd you let him run away for? Where is he?"

"Whut I got ter do wid Punch? Punch lef, heah 'ka'se Viry beat him, an' whut I got ter do wid dat? Ef he had er kep' outer his pizenous meanness he wouldn'r got dat lars' beatin', an' he would er bin heah right now. I ain' seed him since he lef', an' how I know whar' he is?" So she avoided an untruth by asking a question.

"Did you see him when he left?" Don asked.

"Ya—yass," said she, before she had time to think of a subterfuge.

"When?"

"Dat night."

"What time?"

"How I know whut time 'twus, l ain' got no clock."

"Which way did he go?"

"G'way, Don. Yo' sho' dus lek ter ax' questions. How I know?"

Don passed on to his room.

Several days after Don's arrival, John, the elder, having occasion to go to the store for something, told Elvira to hand him his money out of the chest, while he waited, seated upon Dolly. She presently returned and handed him the worn and greasy purse, which he, upon opening and counting the contents, found to be, according to his best recollection, just five dollars less than the amount he thought he had.

"Hi, Viry, whar' dat greenback I put in heah?"
"Whut I know 'bout yo' money, man? Yo' mus' be er fool. I ain' bin nigh yo' money."

"I know jes' es well es I settin' on Dolly, dat I put dat money dar, an' nobody but me an' yo' uver go in dat chis'."

"Yo' mus' fergit sumbody kin git dis key when yo' is sleep, an' kin git dat money 'fo' yo' kin say scat, an' yo' ain' know nuttin' 'bout it. Dat money wus in dar de day b'fo' Punch went erway. He tuk de train dat night arter buyin' er ticket ter Richmon'. Now whar'd he git de money ter do all dat? He mus' er got it sumwhar'," said she.

John was thoughtful a moment, as if he could not decide whether Punch was the thief. At last, raising his head, he said:

"No, dat warn't Punch. I know dat boy too well; he ain' gwine tek nuttin'. Sumbody tuk dat money 'sides Punch."

"Humph, yo' talk jes' lek he too good ter tek hit."
"Dat's hit, he is too good."

"He ain' too good ter cut my th'oat, ef I gin him er chance."

"Dat's 'ka'se yo' meked de boy so mad he didn' had good sense. Nummin', I gwine fin' de one dat tuk dat money jes' as sho's I settin' heah," said John as he rode away.

Elvira watched him disappear, and when he was gone she said to herself:

"Yass, I heah yo' say yo' gwine fin' dat money, but yo' got ter git er better pyar eyes dan dem yo' got 'fo' yo' git hit. Humph, John Brooks, yo' ain' got sense ernuff ter lead er blin' goose ter water; yo' think I gwine let er good chance lak dat go by 'dout doin' my level bes' ter mek dat lim' er Satan smart fer what he dun ter me."

At the thought of which indignity she convulsively clinched her teeth and elaborately strangled an imaginary Punch. This done she entered the house, gave one of her children several resounding smacks,

and bidding Joe take care of the house until her return, she wended her way over to the Mortons. Before Jude was aware of who it was, Elvira had come into the kitchen and flung herself into a chair. The noise of her sudden entrance caused Jude to look up from her work, but without speaking she continued what she was doing. The silence was too much for Elvira, and she was the first to speak.

"Hi, Jude, whut marter'd yo'? Look lek yo' too proud ter speak ter anybody."

"Ain' nuttin' marter'd me. I ain' hyeard yo' say nuttin' yit."

"Yo' gittin' mighty pertickler heah lately. Yo' ain' allus bin so."

"Dat's so; but yo' mus' er fergit sumin'."

"Whut dat?"

"Dat yo' tuk er ring fum me tur'r day yat warn't min', an' yo' ain' gin hit back yit."

"I ain' got hit. Dat sneakin' thief un er Punch dun run way wid hit, an' dat ain' all, nur'r."

"Dat ain' all? I know 'tain' all. I know jes' es well es I stan'in' heah, dat he ain' tuk no ring; an' as fer tur'r, I know he tuk sum er yo' marks on he face wid 'im."

"Yass, he tuk 'em; yass, he tuk 'em; an' de on'y fault I got ter fin', he didn't tuk ernuff. But dat ain' all he dun. He wen' in he daddy's money purs' an' tuk fi' dollars long wid him."

Her words caused the proud Jude to assume every inch of her height, and to say, when her fierce anger permitted her to find words:

"Who say so? Who say so? He ain' stole nuttin' yo' got, nur uver will have. Yo's de ve'y one say he stole hit. I know jes' well es I stan'in' heah he nuver stole hit, 'ka'se de night he lef' he say he nuver had er cen'."

"How yo' know whut he had when he lef' 'way yonder in de night?"

"Nummin 'bout dat, I seed him when he lef' an' he tol' me dem ve'y wu'ds."

"I know dat's whut he say, but I wouldn't trus' dat boy b'hin' er three cen' piece aidgeways. Yo' heah me!"

"Dat don' mek no diffunce ef yo' don' trus' him, ef whut he say is so."

"Heah, I wan' ax' yo' jes' dis much: Ef Punch didn't have no money, how he gwine buy er ticket ter Richmon', dat's whut I wan' ter know?"

"Who says he got er ticket ter Richmon'?" persisted Jude, who was as well aware of Punch's movements as anybody, but feigned ignorance thereof to see how Elvira would sustain her charge.

"Why, ev'ybody knows he bought er ticket dar; now whar' did he git de fi' dollars fum, dat's whut I lek ter know?"

"Humph, dat ain' no sign he tuk de money, 'ka'se he could er borryed 'nuff ter buy er ticket."

"Now I know yo's crazy. Talk erbout dat nigger borryin' money, lek who yo' reck'n gwine turn big 'nuff fool ter len' him money. De money dat nigger lef' heah on wus he daddy's, an' ef uver I lay han's on him, I ain' gwine let loose, twel I lan' him in jail, er git him whupped, one tur'r."

"When yo' git yo' han's on him, Viry, jes' lemme know, an' den I mout tell yo' sumin' yo' don' know 'bout how Punch got 'way fum heah dat night."

With this Jude left the disturber of her peace to her own thoughts. That these thoughts boded no good to Jude or to Punch the reader can readily surmise. For awhile she sat alone in the kitchen, her brow pursed up in an angry and puzzled frown, that well portrayed her perplexity. She had signally failed to convince either John or Jude that Punch was guilty of the theft, and she was conjuring her evil mind to invent some new story, at which she was an adept, to pour into the ear of the next comer who would listen.

Presently, hearing footsteps in the passage, she replaced her bonnet on her head, and stood in the doorway, holding to the door, as if just entering.

"Good mornin', Elvira. I thought Jude was here."

"Good mornin', Mis' Marg'ret. No, ma'r'm, she ain' heah. I jes' stepped in dis minit, an' I seed nobody wus heah an' I wus gwine on."

"Why, I haven't seen you in a long time, Elvira; I don't believe since Punch ran away."

"Dat's so, Mis' Marg'ret. Dat boy party nigh kilt me, an' I ain' got over hit yit. I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd he lek ter skeer'd me ter de'th when he cum er lungin' wid dat knife in he han'."

Here, for the effect it would have on the sympathetic nature of Margaret Morton, she assumed an injured air, that was ludicrous in the strapping woman, when viewed from the standpoint of a disinterested spectator, had he known of her assailant's age and size.

"An' dat ain' all, nur'r," she almost sobbed; "de li'l' scoundrel! Whut yo' reck'n, Mis' Marg'ret, we dun foun' out since he lef'?"

"I don't know. What?"

"Fi' dollars dun gone sumwhar', an' Gawd knows when I seed fi' dollars, le' mo' spen' hit. We all know Punch went ter Richmon', now whar' he git de money ter do all dat?"

She recounted to Mrs. Morton what we already know concerning the whereabouts of the money at a certain time. When she had finished, she gloated with satisfaction at the impression she had made upon Mrs. Morton, and she waited a moment before saying any more to see what effect her words would have.

"The rascally brute," said Mrs. Morton, "what did you provoke him for? You should have known better."

"Didn't I tol' yo', Mis' Marg'ret, dat he stole er ring fum me dat uster 'long ter Polly, an' gin hit ter Jude. An' de day dat Punch lef' I wus over heah, I seed her wyarin' un it, an' I took hit fum her, an' den I foun' out he dun gin hit ter her. Dat meked me jes' es mad es fyer, an' when I started ter

whup him, he tuk an' cum at me wid er butcher-knife."

"Hush, I can scarcely believe it! That quiet, easy-going boy behaving so; you surely are not telling the truth."

"I hope Gawd may strek me daid in my tracks ef ev'y wu'd ain' de Gorspel truf; an' dat ain' all, nur'r. Don' yo' know when dat boy lef' he stole dat ring outer my chis' ag'in, an' whar' 'tis now, Gawd knows, I don'."

So cumulative had the charges become against Punch, that Mrs. Morton was at a loss to believe which was the most offensive, and when the trusted Jude's name was concerned with the theft of the ring, she was deeply pained to hear it, and kept repeating:

"Are you sure, Elvira, that the ring was the same?"

"Yass, marm, dat I is."

"What kind of ring was it?"

"It wus er gol' ring wid li'l' red glass sets in hit."

"A gold ring! How do you know it was gold?"

"Dat I is, an' dat hucom' I know it so good. I ain' nuver seed one lek it b'fo'."

"Then you are sure you are not mistaken?"

"Jes' es sho' as de sun gwine rise ag'in."

"I am so disappointed in Jude. Here I have raised the girl from a child, and for her to be guilty of receiving and trying to withhold a stolen ring, is very discouraging."

"Dat sho' is er fac'," said the exulting Elvira. "De way gals is raised dese lays, no wunder dey so triflin' an' lowlif'ted."

"I will see about this. Tell John I am very sorry Punch has turned out so badly. It seems so strange that he, a child of such a good father and mother, should be so depraved. I am afraid he will be hanged yet."

"Tain' dat. Hit all 's in de raisin'. John allus would spile de chillun, an' dis is whut he git by hit."

Elvira arose as if to go, and Mrs. Morton, having to go to her room, left her. She, after going out of the kitchen, waited until the sound of Mrs. Morton's footsteps had died away, and then, creeping softly back into the dining room, she looked for some conspicuous article that would readily be missed at a glance from its accustomed place, but found nothing that could readily be secreted, until by chance Mrs. Morton's purse was observed as it lay partially hidden by a box on the mantel. Hastily snatching it up, she hurried back to the kitchen, where she ran through it and found, oh, happy luck! a five-dollar gold piece. This she took out, and replaced the purse where she had found it, then returning she took a bonnet belonging to Jude, tied the gold coin in one of the strings, and threw it carelessly on the table and left the room, ardently hoping that the bonnet would be picked up by Mrs. Morton first.

The gods of mischief seem to have kept the innocent Jude away from the kitchen that day an unusual time, and appeared to direct the footsteps of Mrs. Morton thither.

Within a short time after Elvira had left, Mrs. Morton again returned to the kitchen, and in preparation for some work at the table, she threw Jude's bonnet on a chair, and was surprised to hear the muffled jingle of something hard striking the wood. Suspicion of Jude, aroused by the heartless malice of Elvira, caused her to look for the cause of the sound. Lifting the bonnet, one of the strings was heavily pendant, and untying the knot she found the coin.

"Is it possible that Jude can disgrace me so, after all my care in instructing and training her, by precept and example, in the virtues of honesty? I can scarcely believe my eyes, the little scamp. To think all my labor is lost upon her, one of the most faithful and devoted creatures, as I thought, but I was too confident. If Jude stole this money I don't

believe there is a single honest negro living," said Mrs. Morton to herself. Then going to the mantel, where she had left the purse, sure enough the gold was not there.

"Jude; aw Jude!"

"Marm?"

"Come here, I want you."

Jude presently came, and seeing the purse, coin, and her bonnet in Mrs. Morton's hands, she wondered what she could be wanted for.

"Jude, what does this mean?" asked Mrs. Morton, sharply.

"Whut dus whut mean, Mis' Marg'ret?"

"This, this; don't you see this money, and your bonnet, and you ask what I mean!"

"Yass'm, cert'ny I see 'em; but I see dat ole bonnet ev'y day. I don't see nuttin' marter 'd hit, 'cep' hit sorter dirty."

"No, no, you stupid fool! or you feign to be so for a purpose. I found this money tied up in your bonnet string, and there you stand staring as if you thought me crazy. Why did you take the money, Jude? Didn't you know it was wrong?"

"Yass, 'm, co'se I know hit wrong ter steal money, an' I ain' stole none nur'r. I 'clar 'fo' Gawd I don' know nuttin' 'bout dat money, 'ka'se I didn' tie dat money up, an' ef yo' don' know who dun hit, I dus. She cyarn' fool me."

"Whom do you mean?"

"I mean de lowlif'ted 'ooman dat cum heah stole de money outer yo' purs; an' mek out lek I dun dun hit."

"Oh yes, I know it is easy to shift your sins upon other shoulders, but I have been hearing some ugly tales about you, Jude. Only this morning I heard that this is not your only offense, and you know how I dislike to hear such things. Elvira was here a little while ago, and told me of certain happenings concerning a ring that belonged to her which Punch stole the night he left."

The face of the girl became ashy and she felt sick, but pride supported her. Her fine eyes scintillated like a tiger's, and with quickened breath, without thinking in whose presence she was, she cried:

"She's lyin'; lyin' wuss'n er dog! Yass, an' I ain' fyleared ter tell her so, nur'r!"

"Jude, Jude, what does this mean? You know I will not permit this!"

"I 'clar' I fergit dat time, Mis' Marg'ret. I thought dat 'ooman wus up ter sum debblement when I lef' her."

"What, have you seen her this mornin'?"

"Yass, 'm co'se I seed her, 'ka'se I wus in de kitchen when she cum. Huccom' I ain' seed her?"

"Why, she said you were not here when she came in!"

"Now who yo' gwine b'lieve, Mis' Marg'ret? One nigger's word jes' good es er nur'r."

"I am going to believe you, Jude," said Mrs. Morton.

Then Jude's eyes filled with tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUDE'S CONSTANCY.

After Punch's departure Jude, like many another faithful girl, continued to love him, and to see in him the perfection that is so unvarying in young girls for the men they love. As we grow older the imperfections of both sexes become more perceptible, and women come to know how gullible they have been in believing the flaming vows of young blood. With Jude this was the one absorbing theme of her life, consisting as it did of the monotonous routine of work in the house, and made this love affair with Punch something of which the girl felt proud. In fact she felt a certain proprietorship in him, and she even dared to utter aloud to herself the declaration that "He's my Punch."

How lonesome she sometimes became. But when she could spare the time she would take those precious letters that he had written to her and creep away to a quiet spot, and read them all over, which was done so constantly that the creases in the sheets caused them to fall apart, but she retained the scraps and read them one at a time.

After the discovery by Mrs. Morton recorded in the last chapter, the breach of course widened between Jude and Elvira, for the former well knew who it was that perpetrated the infamous trick in which she sought, and with anybody else than Mrs. Morton might have won, some unworthy revenge.

While Mrs. Morton was quite sure that Jude was telling the truth, since she had been informed of the duplicity of Elvira, still she sought to make assur-

ance doubly sure, and she began to leave money about in out of the way places, but she never found any missing. She even went so far in her experimenting as to leave some handkerchiefs in Jude's room, but they were always returned to her, and it was the same likewise with some rings. Then her confidence was entirely restored in Jude, and she thought a vast deal more of her than ever.

As the months went by, letters from Punch became more and more infrequent. His handwriting improved, and his letters when read aloud sounded very different from the way he used to talk. He had long ago told her of his good fortune in securing a position and his opportunity to go to school. He had also returned the money Jude had given him when he had left her, and had accompanied it with a present of as much more. When a registered letter was handed her at the office one day she opened it with tremulous hands, and the money dropped out; and it was then that she felt that Punch was gradually severing the ties that bound them, and she was sick at heart, for she was quite sure that Punch was beginning to forget her. But when she had read his letter, every line of which told how much and how constantly he loved her, she was supremely happy. When another letter was received within the usual time after this money was sent, she was more than reassured, and her hope returned.

When, however, she read in this letter something about the beauty of a girl named Julia, her heart sank and she was unhappy again, because she was jealous already at the mere mention of another woman's name. So vigilant is the jealous mind that it takes notice of the least variation in the interval of writing, the number of endearing words, the tone, and the thousand other unnoticeable things about a letter; every meaning is misconstrued and distorted until the writer would certainly never

recognize his letters as received by the jealous mind. By the time the following morning had come, Jude had assured herself that Punch was head over heels in love with Julia, and in consequence was too utterly miserable to live.

Later on, after several more readings of his letter, she softened somewhat in her conclusions, but the "beautiful Julia" was unbearable. Why did not Punch call her beautiful? she would ask herself, and the girl would examine her face in the little looking glass in her room; but it was so small that not more than one cheek, an eye, and part of her brow could be seen *ensemble* at the same time. So the first opportunity that presented itself after that letter was received she might have been seen furtively looking at herself in the big mirror in the parlor, and had become so disheartened and wretched that she went off and cried, because she could not make up her mind that she, too, was beautiful.

Time, the great obliterator, removes the sharp edges of suffering and of disappointments, and before very long Jude forgot that nobody had ever called her beautiful. Still she loved Punch with all the devotedness that her loving and passionate nature prompted her to do.

She had many a cry because he would not write oftener, and when the interval between letters stretched to a month, she almost despaired, and many times had about made up her mind never to write to him again; but a saving letter would come, and she would be all smiles and tears again.

Once, three years or more after the departure of Punch, when Jude had despaired of hearing from him again, and her bitter sorrow at his neglect had begun to lose its bitterness, she received a letter wholly unlike the blurred, blotted, and ill-addressed letters of months before, and she at once recognized in the perfumed, immaculate envelope a letter from Punch, and her heart gave a great bound for very

joy. In this letter he told her that after so long an absence he was coming home on a visit, and would bring with him his friend, Mr. Still Lawson.

He wrote that he had left his former place in the drug store, and now was making plenty of money, and "didn't have to work hard either." All of which Jude thought was indeed remarkable, for she, among others, had shared the opinion, openly expressed, that "Punch ain' nuver had no mo' sense dan de law 'lows." This was changed now, and she was the first to recognize his ability and to say to herself:

"Humph, I know de folks dat allus talkin' 'bout Punch ain' got no sense, 'ka'se I allus b'lieve in Punch fum de fus', an' say dat boy gwine cum yit. All yo' got ter do is stan' er side an' watch him."

For these long years the faithful girl had kept the secret of her lover's whereabouts inviolable; and not until she had received this letter telling of his proposed visit did she feel warranted in divulging it.

The very day of its reception, Jude took the letter over to John's house, and it being late she found him at home.

"Good evenin', Unc' John."

"Hi, Jude, howd'y. I ain' seed yo' in de longes' sorter time. How yo' do?

He had seen her the day before, but mention of that would have spoiled the cordiality of his greeting.

"Unc' John, I got sumin' ter tell yo', an' I know yo' ain' gwine ter b'lieve me."

"Whut dat, gal? Don't prodjik wid yo' Unc' John."

"I hyeard Punch gwine cum ter-morrow."

John's face brightened into a pleased grin, that made the bearer of the news happy in being the one to inform him.

"Whar yo' heah dat?" he asked.

"I ain' hyeard nobody say so, but I got dis letter tur'r day, an' he say he gwine cum den."

"Lemme see," asked John as he took the letter in his eager trembling hand.

"Yo' say Punch writ' dis letter?"

"Yas, seh."

"Whar he lyearn ter writ' lek dat, I jes' lek ter know? When he lef' heah he could sca'ce write he name."

"Dat so. Punch mus' dun lyearn er heap since he bin down dar in Richmon'."

"When dat yo' say he cumin'?"

"Ter-morrow."

"Whar' he gwine git off—he say enythin' 'bout dat?"

"Yas, seh; he say he gwine cum on de evenin' train, an' gwine git off at Clov'dale."

"Waal, seh, ef dat don' mek me feel better'n I'se felt since he run'd erway."

So joyful was John at the prospect of Punch's return that he so far forgot his usual good manners as to leave Jude standing in the yard while he went into the house to tell Elvira and the children. The children were so jubilant at the prospect of their brother's return that they celebrated the event by knocking each other down and capering about like mad things.

Elvira did not partake in the extravagant joy that characterized John and the children, but instead seemed very much unconcerned about the matter, and if the truth were known she wished him to visit the devil rather than his home.

"Yass, I thought all de time dat li'l' wench know'd whar' he wus, and now arter she dun tol' him whut I say he dun I spec' he gwine cum heah fer ter raise er fuss. But I know dis much, if he cum roun' me puttin' on a'rs, I ain' gwine ter stan' hit. Nor I ain'." And she brought her heavy foot down with such emphasis that she raised a cloud of dust and shook the floor.

It was October, and the delightful month was just closing when John, on coming in the house

after feeding, told Elvira he was going to kill Sukey next morning before he started for Punch.

"Name er Gawd man, yo' mus' be crazy! Ef yo' kill dat hog now dar ain' gwine be er piece big es dat lef' by Chris'mus," and she showed him the size on her finger.

"I ain' keerin' ef she don' lars' twel nex' week. I gwine kill her ef hit de lars thing I do. Gawd knows ef I hadn' b'lieved whut yo' said, Punch nuver would er lef' home lek he dun."

"Yass, dat's whut yo' allus doin', blamin' me 'ka'se dat no-coun' nigger lef' home. Yo' knows jes' es well es I dus, dat he tried ter kill me dat day, an' he lef' 'ka'se yo' gin him sich er whuppin'."

"Nummin' 'bout dat, yo' git r'ady, 'ka'se I gwine kill dat hog in de mornin' 'fo' day."

The affectionate father, though seemingly brutal to his children, was softened by illness or absence, and was willing to deny himself, even to a morsel of bread, that he might give it to them. So it was that the doom of the unconscious and unfortunate Sukey was brought forward several weeks on account of Punch's visit, for John remembered that one of his son's most distinguishing traits was a liking for fresh meat. Therefore he thought no greater compliment could be paid him, during his contemplated visit, than to fill him with this delicacy.

Accordingly, before departing the next day, the hog was killed, and John as he drove off to the station eyed with satisfaction the well-dressed hog stiffening in the cool breeze.

After a long wait at the station, the long blast of the engine whistle, as it shrieked through the echoing woods, made the expectant father start to his feet. The train dashed up to the sleepy village, with its whirl-wind of dust, and a confusion of noises that bewildered one. Everybody seemed busily engaged in getting in everybody else's way, while some pretended to look for friends on the

train as an excuse for entering the comfortable cars, where for a brief instant they lounged upon the upholstered cushions, then rushed madly out of the car as it quickened its speed, to leap off at eminent risk of life and limb.

The arrival and departure of trains at stations in sparsely-settled counties are the events of the day. There may be found sauntering along the rude platform every type of society, from the dignified county judge or the pompous village doctor, to the one-horse farmer in a suit of jeans; or the negro cow-boy revelling in a few cents' worth of ginger cakes. Then there is the frivolous maiden coyly talking to a young man just come out of one of the stores, evidence of his hasty toilet being too unmistakable to overlook; and he looks for all the world as though it would be a blessing indeed if the train would make haste and be gone, and so remove his thrallodom. And the always present woman in black, with the impatient uneasiness of one whose mind is tortured by anguish, paces back and forth like a restless animal, and goes to the agent every few minutes to ascertain when the train will come.

The train had scarcely come to a stand still when a heavy hand was laid on John's shoulder, and a manly voice said:

"Howd'y, daddy; I haven't seen you in a long time."

"Hi, dis ain' my Punch," said John as he took the proffered hand of his son. "Waal, I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd, boy, ef yo' ain' mos' growed outer my reckerlection. Cum heah, seh." Saying which the delighted father caught his long-absent son in his arms and squeezed him like a bear. When he released him again the eyes of both father and son were bedewed with happy tears.

Punch on being released turned to young Lawson, who had witnessed the happy reunion with apparent unconcern, and presented his father to him.

"This is Mr. Still Lawson, daddy."

"Mr. Brooks, I am glad to meet you," said Still as he held out his hand.

John thought it very strange that this young man should offer to shake hands, but he shook the outstretched hand, and said:

"Howdy, Mis' Lawson; how yo' feel ter-day, seh? How's all yo' folks at home?"

"They are well, thank you."

"Waal, Punch," said John, again affectionately addressing his son, who winced under the old nickname, which he had hoped forever forgotten, "le's go home, hit purty nigh sun-down, an' we got er long ways ter go."

"Come on, Still, and get in the wagon," said Punch as he picked up a shining black valise and followed his father.

"Well, I declare, there is old Dolly," said the young man as he patted the old mule affectionately on her neck, while she resented such familiarity from a stranger by backing her ears; but presently seeming to recognize an old friend, permitted him to do as he liked. Dolly had lost, during these long years, some of her youthful fire, but not a bit of her former obstinacy, and on her way home had to be led across a little bridge that she had crossed something short of a thousand times.

"I b'lieve dis fool mule's sperit gwine be feared ter cross er bridge arter she daid," commented John as he climbed back into the vehicle.

On the journey home Punch had the delightful experience of being again in the country, from whence he had been so long, and he felt an air of freedom and a desire to run over the green fields that were fast becoming brown. How fresh everything looked, even this late in the year, in comparison with the bleakness and barrenness of the city streets. As they rode along, and the old landmarks presented themselves, the familiar house appeared to the eyes of the happy youth very much shrunken in size, and to have become very old since he left.

"We mos' dar now, Mis' Lawson. Which way yo' gwine, seh?"

"He's goin' with us, daddy," said Punch, before Still could answer.

"Is dat so? Dey ain' 'spectin' un yo', 'ka'se I ain' hyeard nobody say nuttin' 'bout hit."

"So much the better," said Still; "we shall surprise them."

"I thought I wrote that I would bring a friend with me, but I must have been mistaken."

This sentence was lost upon John, whose attention to Dolly, during the passage of a bad spot in the road, prevented his hearing it. There was a tedious and rough drive after leaving the public road, then the farm was reached, and as the familiar objects of his childhood appeared even in the moonlight, Punch experienced the sensation of a traveler returning from a foreign land when land is first sighted. Everybody knows who has experienced it, how delightful it is.

As the wagon pulled up in the yard of the cabin, the children, overjoyed at the idea of seeing Punch, rushed upon him in a phalanx as he alighted, and even Elvira condescended so far as to come forward and offer her hand, which Punch took coolly.

By a powerful effort of self-control Jude had not come to welcome Punch home, but had remained at the house, outwardly as much unconcerned, as if he had been going the other way instead of being within a few hundred yards of her. Nevertheless this did not prevent her listening with straining ears, to catch the faintest sound of the approaching wagon. When, amid the stillness of the soft October night, she heard the welcome crunching of the wheels on the gravel, her devoted heart gave a great bound and then seemed to stop as if in doubt, but no, there it was, and he had come! and she clapped her hands joyfully.

When at last her quick ears heard the stopping of the wagon, and the glad shouting of the children

reached her, she indeed knew he had come, and entered the house with a buoyant spirit.

After John had witnessed the happy reunion of his long-absent son with his other children, he turned to Still Lawson and said:

"Waal, Mis' Lawson, when yo' r'ady, seh, git in, an' I'll tek yo' over ter de house in er pyar minits."

Lawson was getting into the wagon in obedience to this request, when Punch, seeing him, walked rapidly up and asked:

"Where are you goin', Still?"

"Your father says he's goin' to take me to the house, wherever that is."

"That's all right, you won't go a step further th.s night," said the young man.

Then Punch whispered a word or two in the ear of his father, who looked up in amazement, but the faint light did not make it manifest.

"Is dat so? Waal I'll be dog-gone."

"Dat's all right, Still, yo' git down off' dat waggin. We ain' gwine mek comp'ny outer yc , an' I gwine ter mek er start by callin' yo' Stil' jes' lek Punch, 'ka'se I ain' useter misterin' boys lek yo'. Cum in boys, an' mek yo'se'ves at home."

The boys did enter, and in a little while were eating a steaming hot supper of ash-cake, buttermilk, and deliciously broiled pork. So flurried had Elvira become since the arrival of the handsome young man, that she scarcely knew what she was about, and while no unusual preparation had been made for the return of Punch, her supper had to come on the table as it was, to her everlasting mortification and shame, for to use her words:

"Dar now, I ain' got nuttin' but ash-cake an' er li'l' fresh meat fer supper, an' not er dus' er flour in de house, an' I 'spec' he useter poun' cake ev'y day."

Such, however, we know to be not the case; and to tell the truth, the enormous suppers eaten by

both young men bore sufficient evidence that better food would not have pleased them more.

As for Punch, he had been looking forward for a long time to eating another of those delicious meals in the country and at home. After the supper was over, the little gifts that Punch had brought for the children were given to each. His father had been crowned with a new hat, which he steadfastly wore the remainder of the evening in honor of the donor. As for Elvira, she seemed to have been forgotten, whether intentionally or not will never be known. She sat in the chimney corner, her face bearing signs of the resentment she still held against Punch, and her eyes danced with fiery light as she looked at the happy children, and she spoke only when spoken to.

The evening finally drew to a close, and Still was shown his bed in the loft. While this was not altogether to his liking, he did not demur, but retired.

Punch went down stairs again, and sitting down by his father, said:

"Daddy, I hear somebody said the night I left here I stole the money out of your purse to go with. Before I go to sleep in your house to-night I want to ask you if you believe this?"

"Who said yo' ever stole eny money, son?"

Here Punch looked at Elvira, who defiantly withstood his scrutiny, and even taunted him with:

"I hope yo'll know me nex' time yo' see me."

This remark Punch permitted to pass unnoticed.

"But how yo' know yo' bin 'cused er tekin' money?"

"This is how: For three years and more I have written to somebody in this county, and this person wrote me so. That is how I found out, and I believe what that individual says wholly, just as I want you to believe me."

"Dat's all right, son. I b'lieve I did heah sumin' 'bout dat 'way back yonder, but dem lies didn't stick in my haid no longer dan water dus on de duck's

back. Dey wen' in one year an' cum out tur'r. Cert'ny I b'lieve yo', boy. I ain' got nuttin' else ter do."

"What became of the money you lost then, daddy?"

"I 'spec' de debble got hit."

"I am very glad you haven't lost faith in me, daddy."

"I ain' nuver dun hit."

Father, son, and step-mother exchanged glances, then retired.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAN'S DIVERSION.

During the following day Punch and Still, after having slept late, breakfasted, and sauntered leisurely forth in their most genteel dress to see Jude, as Punch had suggested before leaving Richmond, and many times since.

"I can't see why she didn't come over home anyhow. But then you know these country women ain't forward like those in town. That's why I want a sweetheart from the country. In town they see and learn more devilment before they are twelve years old than a country girl would learn in a lifetime."

"I can't say that that makes much difference, because when they go to the city, if they ever do, they rapidly learn and make up for lost time," replied Still.

"That might be true of some women, but not of Jude," said Punch.

"Not of Jude, eh? Well, she must be different from all the other women I ever saw."

"That's it; she is different."

"Yes, I know she's different; just about the same difference that there is between one cherry and another. No, Jim, when you are as old as I am you will see how much alike all women are. You will see, further, that a clever, firm, and determined man can outwit and capture the most wily woman livin'. Now, show me your beauty."

The two had by this time reached the Morton's, and the kitchen door being partly ajar, Punch

pushed it open, and there before the table stood his paragon straining her eyes in the direction of John's house, in vain endeavor to catch sight of him for whom she had been looking the whole morning. It was no wonder she gave a start of surprise as Punch, without making any noise beforehand, said:

"Hi, Jude, here I am. What are you lookin' that way for?"

Directly she heard that familiar voice her heart seemed to stand still, and then with a great bound leaped into her mouth, and she felt like she did when his letters came—she would like to defer the meeting longer solely for the pleasure to be had in anticipation. Without manifesting very ardent pleasure at seeing her lover after the long separation, and feeling somewhat abashed at being taken unawares, she maintained with characteristic coolness her self-possession—that is, to all outward appearances.

"Hi, Punch," said she, approaching him, "yo' sho' did skeer me."

They shook hands, and Punch kissed her.

"Allow me to make you acquainted with Mr. Lawson, Miss Williams."

Jude held out her little dimpled hand proudly, which Still took for a moment, and the two bowed acknowledgment of the introduction; Jude very slowly, and Still stiffly, and with the formality of the society in which he had been reared.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Williams," said Still.

Jude was too confused to make audible what she said. Could it be possible, thought she, that the man just introduced to her had any negro blood in him, or could it possibly be that Punch had become acquainted with some white people down there in Richmond who did not forbear association with the negro race. She had read something about this in an occasional newspaper that had found its way to her hands, but she did not much believe it. Yet he

was so nearly white that she was for the time deceived. However, this did not deter her from admiring him extravagantly, for several occasional glimpses of his handsome person seemed to convince her forcibly that she never had seen so well dressed nor handsome a man before. The long and awkward silence following the introduction provoked Punch into saying:

"Well, Jude, where is your tongue? Here I have been away over three years, and you have nothing to say to an old friend, nor to his friend."

Reminded of her dereliction of duty, Jude found her tongue, and set about Punch's ears at a great rate for remaining away so long from his home and people.

"Dey mus' ain' much in yo' min' when yo' stay 'way lek dat. Dat's jes' de way when dese country niggers goes ter town, dey soon gits 'shamed er dey kinfolks, an' mus' be fyleared sumbody gwine ax 'em ter let 'em stay wid 'em when dey go ter town."

The tone of banter which Jude could use so well, and which Punch could not bear, irritated the boy sorely, but he knew Jude, and knew that she would have ridiculed him in the presence of others until they would have thought him most detested by her, yet when alone with him would become the most winsome little creature in the world; or when absent writing the most devoted letters, forgetting for the time those barbed arrows with which she interspersed her conversation when in the presence of others.

Before Still had known her an hour her bewitching air had fascinated him as few women had done. The delightful candor of the girl, her unsophisticated manner, the dimples in her cheeks, that came and went with the swiftness and beauty of summer clouds; her soft black eyes that twinkled like black diamonds, and the long glossy hair which was braided about her head so becomingly, all charmed him so that his passionate senses almost overcame

him as he watched her moving about the room attending to her duties, stopping now and then to tease Punch about something.

Presently Punch and his friend arose to go, and after promising to return for her that night, they took their leave.

"I tell you what let's do," said Punch as he got out of hearing. "We haven't got much to do, so let's go round to the neighbors and get up a party to-night, and surprise the folks at home, and Jude, too. What do you say?"

"I'm willing to do anything to pass the time away, Jim, or Punch; I don't know what to call you since you came up here."

"Call me Punch, that sounds more natural. Nobody knows me by the name of Jim up here," returned Punch.

"By all means have a party, anything. I feel like I am gettin' lonesome already, and how I do want a glass of beer."

"Beer? Why you shall have some just as soon as we get to the next house."

"What? Now, Punch, don't attempt to impose upon my ignorance of the country, for I am not such a fool as to believe that beer, real genuine beer, is to be found out here."

"Well, just wait and see, and when you have had a gourdful or two we will see whether you think the country can afford beer or no."

Pretty soon they turned into a path leading from the main road toward a log cabin set immediately in the center of a large tobacco "ground," from which the tobacco had been entirely cut. They stopped before the door, and Punch, according to custom, asked:

"Housekeeper?"

He was answered by a voice from within:

"Cum in."

The two entered, and Punch said:

"Howd'y, Aunt Mandy?"

"Who is yo' dat knows me so good, an' I don' know who yo' is?" asked Mandy Jackson querulously.

"Don't you know who I am?" asked Punch; "don't you remember John's Punch?"

"Co'se I reckerlek Punch; but g'way, boy, 'tain' while ter mek out yo'se dat li'l' nigger, 'ka'se I ain' gwine ter b'lieve hit."

"Whether you believe it or no, I am the one they used to call Punch."

When Mandy had assured herself that the boy was indeed Punch, she gave him one of those characteristic greetings peculiar to her, that almost took away his breath, so tightly did she clasp him in her arms.

"I'se er good min' ter wyar yo' out, yo' rascal, fer runnin' 'way fum me lek dat," said she as he was released from the stifling embrace. Wondering why she could evince such an interest in him, because she had scarcely noticed him before he left home, still he allowed her to flatter and fawn as much as she pleased, which must be confessed did not altogether displease our hero, for he was at that age when one is most confident in oneself, and he felt that he must deserve her notice.

When he had made Still known and had answered the innumerable questions asked him, he said to her:

"Aunt Mandy, do you ever make any beer these days?"

"Mek eny beer? G'way, boy, yo' mus think I ain' got nuttin' ter do but mek beer fer yo' an' ev'ybody dat cum long. Whut I gwine mek beer fer?"

"Why, to drink. I remember you used to make it better than anybody I knew, and what you made used to be sharper and older and better in every way than any I ever tasted before or since."

Punch had touched upon one of Mandy's vulnerable points, and her face bore a smile of pride as she said:

"Hol' on, boy, yo' dunno whut yo' talkin' 'bout. Yo' ain' seed no beer. De best beer I uver made, wus de year arter s'render, and dat wus beer dat yo' call beer. Nummin', jes' wait twel I cum back," and she caught up a tin bucket and disappeared out of the doorway. They had scarcely missed her before she returned and placed the bucket brimming full of foaming brown persimmon beer upon the table, and taking the gourd from the nail by the door, bade them help themselves.

Punch tendered a dipperful to his companion, who seemed as surprised as if a saloon had been brought from the city in the length of time necessary to draw the beer before him. He drank every bit, and exclaimed as he handed the gourd back to Punch:

"It is good!"

"Dat ain' nuttin' ter whut I is made," said Mandy as she watched the young men drink until the whole bucketful had disappeared, and she seemed to take evident pleasure in depreciating the value of the present product as compared with the excellence of that of years before.

Both young men were unstinted in their praises of her brewing, and declared, upon leaving, that they had never tasted such beer before.

Seeing that Punch did not offer to pay for the beverage, Still drew forth some money from his pocket and tendered it in payment, but Mandy would not touch it, saying, as if offended:

"Hi, man, whar' yo' cum fum? Folks 'bout heah don' ax' no pay fer 'simmon beer. Hit jes' as free as de ole spring down yonder, er es er meal er vit-tles."

Still slowly returned the money to his pocket, as if ashamed that he had tendered payment for the hospitality shown him, and joined Punch.

"That's so, I most forgot it," said Punch as he came back. "Tell the boys to come over home to-night. We are goin' to have a little party; and you

come too, Aunt Mandy. Tell them to be sure to come. Good-by."

"Dar now, wunder whut dat fool boy 'spec' I kin do at er party. Nummin', I'se gwine all de same. Dat boy sho' is likely, but I don' lek dat man Still, an' I ain' nuver seed him b'fo' nur'r."

When it grew dark the invited guests began to arrive, which of course did not surprise John nor Elvira, for they were prepared upon all occasions to endure with patience the frolics of the young folks, and even to partake in their innocent dances, even if it was in direct opposition to the tenets of their church, for few were ever mean enough to turn informer. So when the music began it was not long before John appeared on the floor with a buxom lass scarce half his age, and the figure the two presented as they cavorted about was indeed ludicrous, producing spasms of laughter from those assembled.

"Lemme go, Unc' John!" exclaimed his companion, but he, deaf to her playful entreaty, pursued the dance much against the girl's will, until cessation of the music brought them to a stop.

Jude had come with Punch, and the girl never looked so handsome nor so happy before. She remembered how much Punch liked to see her dressed in white, and had come in the only white dress she possessed, that had been made to fit her beautifully molded form until her graceful outlines became ravishing to the passionate eyes of Lawson.

Her hair had been braided and coiled about her head in a bewitching manner, and her beautiful teeth, virgin in their perfection, gleamed from between the mobile lips that betokened their possessor's mood. Her eyes fairly danced with youth and happiness and her deeply-bronzed skin resembled in its dusky luster that of an old statue that had long since lost its newness and polish. Her well-rounded throat and shoulders, scarcely hidden by the gauzy fabric, gave even more than a fair inkling

of the swelling bosom as it rose and fell with the restlessness of old ocean.

The girl wore the old garnet ring that night for the first time, in public, since Punch had been away. As she entered the house she caused more than one man's head to turn to follow her with his eyes, and, listening closely, remarks might have been heard concerning her such as: "Dat's er fin' gal;" "Look how she tote dat haid," etc., etc.

The music began. There was the monstrous wheezing of the French harmonica, and the everlasting repetition of the dance-music played on an old banjo, out of tune, and by a performer who appeared to think it the acme of perfection in banjo playing when one could throw the instrument over his head and still keep it going. He was evidently trying to make the visitors from the city aware that some genius was left in the country yet.

Punch, as a matter of course, danced first with Jude, but apparently his heart was not in the dance nor in being with her, and they had scarcely been together an hour before Jude noticed the lack of interest on his part, and it hurt her.

"Hi, boy, don' yo' wan' ter dance?" she asked.

"No," he replied; "that fellow over there knows no more about playin' a banjo than a child, and that one with a harp does worse."

"Humph, dat's jes' lek ev'ybody I see go ter town. Dey cum back heah an' think 'tain' nuttin' in de worl' but whut's in town; but I nuver thought 'twould er changed yo' lek dat."

"I'm not changed," said he. "It's only that I have seen more of the world, and I know what it is to be better than I once was, and to see more clearly my own mistakes as well as those of others."

"Den yo' mus' er made er mistake—"

"Excuse me, Miss Jude," said Still, coming up to where the two were standing, and interrupting them, "but won't you dance next set with me? I

have been waitin' a long time for the chance of askin' you."

Just then the prompter sang out "chose yo' partners." And with an enchanting smile of consent she took the arm of the handsome young man, and they walked to their place.

The music began again, and with its unending monotone persisted until the dancers, weary with fatigue, dropped out one by one, until only a few couples were left. Then it ceased, and the dancers sought their seats.

"Where did you learn to dance, Miss Jude?"

"I ly'arnt right heah at home," she replied.

"You dance splendidly; better, I think, than many I have seen that had been to a dancin' school. You must like to dance, don't you?"

"Dat I dus, an' much erbleeged ter yo' fer thinkin' I dance good. I ain' nuver heah nobody say one way er tur'r."

Perhaps Still did not altogether say the truth when he said she danced well, because he saw many imperfections in her movements, but compared with the clumsy clowns who danced beside her, she was as graceful as a fawn.

How great an oversight in Punch. She was thinking, during a pause in the conversation, that he had never noticed that she danced well, and the more she meditated the greater became the enormity, and her womanly vanity was offended.

Punch had accepted her taste in dress, her good looks, and her grace as a matter of course, and not possessing the parts of a flatterer, he failed to touch that chord of sympathy or of vanity in the heart of Jude during the whole of their acquaintance as had Still in the short time he had been with her.

Still Lawson had seen too much of the world not to have become aware of the fact that woman's self-love would evolve her ruin provided the tempter persisted in his efforts, or at least such was his belief; and having observed Jude and Punch while

together, he had not failed to notice the fondness of Jude for Punch, while the latter was rather luke-warm in the display of his affection for her. He could not help seeing the loving nature of the girl, for it manifested itself in many little ways. So after the dance he had promptly and firmly made up his mind to supplant Punch, not if he could, for he was firmly convinced of that, but rather to please his vanity for conquest.

On Jude's part she confessed to a feeling within her own heart that she must deserve more notice than Punch gave her, and to be told that she was good looking and danced well by a stranger was a great compliment, and she felt the weight of it, for had this handsome young man not seen many beautiful women, and the best dancers, too?

When the music commenced again, Jude and Still appeared on the floor and danced through the set. Punch, in the meantime, had been telling a simple country girl, whom he had been seated near, of the many wonders to be seen in the city, while his listener stared in open-eyed wonder at his marvelous stories, for we regret to say that many that he told were fantastic creations of his without a semblance of truth in them. However, he must make a good impression, which he not only succeeded in doing, but in making several swarthy swains, who had overheard the tales told by him, exceedingly envious of his lot, and many resolved straightway to go and investigate.

When the party was over the young people dispersed, everybody walking, the beautiful October moon affording sufficient light, and the happy voices of the young people floating through the frosty night air as they journeyed to their homes, would have made the dreariest heart cheery.

Punch accompanied Jude to the Morton's, and on the way he began speaking of Still:

"Still is a fine fellow, and he's the best friend I've

got Jude, but you danced with him too long to-night."

"I don' think I did. I ain' danced none since I dunno when, an' I jes' loves ter dance."

"If you wanted to dance so much, I would have danced with you if you had asked me."

"Humph, who yo' reckon I is dat I gwine ax' yo' ter dance wid me. De boys ax' de gals, Punch; de boys ax de gals. I ain' gwine beg nobody ter dance wid me. I'se pertickler 'bout dat."

"Hold on, Jude; I didn't mean any harm. I had been away so long I forgot that you liked to dance. If you had only told me."

"Yass, but dat ain' fer me ter do, dat's fer yo' ter fin' out. I feel jes' lek I ain' seen yo' fer a long, long time," said Jude, softening, and laying her hand on Punch's arm. "Why, Punch, yo' dun changed so since yo' bin erway dat I sca'cely know yo'. Yo' don' ac' free an' e'sy lek yo' useter; an' whut yo dus fer me, hit look lek yo' heart sumwhar' else all de time. Hit look lek yo' try ter mek comp'ny er me. Sumtimes I think since yo' cum back, an' I see whut a likely boy yo' is, an' heah how good yo' talk, dat yo' dun grow'd tired er me, an', an'—" but the broken voice got no further, and the disheartened girl sobbed outright.

"Why, Jude, what are you cryin' for; what have I done? Tell me the rest. You are keepin' something back."

"Naw, I ain' gwine keep nuttin' back, I dun seen fum de fus' night yo' cum dat yo' wus changed, 'ka'se ef dat had been b'fo' yo' lef' home yo' would er mos' broke yo' neck cumin' ter see me."

"Humph, is that all, you little foolish girl. Didn't you know I was tired after that long ride, and I was late before we got home."

Jude's face brightened, and as the moon lit it up the tears dried upon her cheeks, and she felt happier; still, she was not altogether reassured.

"Do yo' know whut I started ter do jes' now?" she innocently asked.

"No; what?"

"I started ter give yo' dis back ag'in, 'ka'se I thought yo' didn't love me no mo'," said she as she held up her hand with the ring on it that he had given her with so many vows of everlasting attachment.

"Go away, Jude; you are worse than foolish. Have I ever ceased to love you since the time you were a little girl?" And he kissed the trusting girl, who believed him as truly as only a true woman can. But the kiss that he gave her was one of pity rather than love, and there was not that fervid thrill about it that, having been once experienced, is never, never forgotten.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WITCHERY OF WOMAN.

When Jude and Punch parted that night at the kitchen door she went to her room, but failed to sleep, because of the conflicting thoughts that for hours tortured her almost to a frenzy.

She kept repeating over and over the words that he had said to her, dwelling longest upon the tenderest passages, as they were so few; and summing up his actions again and again, and asking herself over and over, "I wunder dus he love me, sho' 'nuff." Presently she slept, and dreamed that he did love her, and that she was in his arms and laughing and crying at the same time for very joy; but the tears trickling down her cheeks wakened her, and she cried bitterly and in earnest, because her happiness had been a phantom and not a perfect realization.

In a few days their visit was over. Punch had told Jude when he was going, which news she had received with an aching heart, but with a smile that so far deceived the young fellow that he did not know what the separation was costing her.

When Still came to say good-by he was lavish in his praise of the way he had been entertained, for Punch had been purposely left behind upon this occasion. He, accidentally, of course, met Jude as she was coming from the cowpen with two steaming buckets of milk, one in her hand and the other poised upon her graceful head, without touching it with her hand, like an Egyptian. She stopped short, and looked confused to be caught by the stranger at such work, and he, seeing her confusion,

thought her handsomer than ever, so he lifted the bucket from her head, saying:

"Let me carry it for you."

And before she could say "tain' wile," he had taken both buckets, and was talking so fast she had no distinct idea what he was saying.

"Well, Jude, I have come to say good-by, and to go back to the city to my work, where I shall be always anxious to return again to this quiet place with all its freedom and plenty, and, above all, to be privileged to come to see you again. May I?"

"Why, co'se yo' kin. Yo' kin cum jes' when yo' want'er. I ain' got nuttin' ter do wid how off'en yo' cum."

"I know that, but I want to know if you will let me come to see you, you?"

"Why, Mis' Still, I dunno 'bout dat; I dunno whut er man lek yo' kin see in er country gal lek me ter want'er keep cumin' ter see, when dey's heap mo' lik'lier ones whar yo' cum fum?"

"That may be," replied Still; "but if they are ever so beautiful and rich even, which few of them are, and they are not loved by me. I had as lief all of they were as ugly as witches. Jude, only say that I may come again to see you."

"How kin I help whut yo' dus, man? Yo' ax' me kin yo' cum ter see me lek how kin I he'p whut yo' dus. I know Punch gwine git mad es fyer when he finds hit out, but I ain' keerin' 'bout dat."

This was a ruse on Jude's part, for Punch would have made slight objection had he been present, so trustful was he of this friend, whom he held more faithful than he felt even himself to be.

"But Punch does not love you like I do," said Still.

"How yo' know he don'? I ain' got nuttin' ter prove hit by, an' dat's whut ev'y boy dun say er r'ady dat cum roun' heah. 'Fo' dey know me good, heah dey cum haid overheels ter tell me how much dey love me. I heah whut dey got ter say, an'

sorter give 'em er ha'f-way answer dat meks 'em think dey got me sho', but pres'n'y dey sorter cool down when dey roun' me, an' den, fus' thing I know, dey tellin' de same pack er lies ter tur'r gals. Is dat de way yo' gwine do, Mis' Lawson?"

"No, I declare upon my honest word as a man, Jude, that I love you; I love you as few men can love a woman, and I call upon the Almighty to strike me dead if what I say is not true."

In his ardor he had put down the pails of milk, and taken her hand, which she withdrew hastily, and started away with the milk, when he called to her appealingly and bid her be seated on a log by the path. It was early, the sun was just rising, and its soft light made her more handsome to Still than ever, and as they sat there, even though the air was frosty, they seemed oblivious of it, or at least Still was.

"Yo' say dat yo' love me," said Jude, leaving off her tone of banter; "but maybe dar's sumbody else dat loves me, too, an' dat I love, an' when I dun gin my wu'd, I cyarn' bre'k hit."

"You need not break it. If he ceases to love you he saves you the trouble by breakin' his."

"I know dat too, but he ain' broke his wu'd yit, an' I gwine b'lieve whut he say jes' es long es I got bref, I don' keer whut nobody say."

"I know who it is, just as well as if you had named him, that you are so much in love with; but I have known him several years, and he never appeared to me very much absorbed in any love affair except one, and indeed he seems upon the brink of madness regardin' this."

"What?" exclaimed Jude, her face exhibiting a picture of bitter disappointment as an account of her lover's inconstancy was narrated to her.

"Hesh, hesh, I ain' gwine heah nay nur'r wu'd, 'ka'se I don' b'lieve er wu'd yo' say," she continued.

"Well, if you don't care to hear what I have come to say, why we had best part here and now," said

Still-as he raised his hat ceremoniously; but he added: "When I see you again, maybe you will be in a better humor to hear my story out. Good-by."

Jude said nothing, but covering her head with the old slat bonnet, she mechanically took up her pails and walked toward the house. She mechanically strained the milk, mechanically lit the fire in the dining-room, and as mechanically got breakfast, all the while thinking of man's perfidy, and of one in particular.

Jude was aroused from this painful reverie as she stood at the kitchen table by the encircling arms of Punch, who clasped her to him, and kissed her. In a moment her faith in him had been regained, and she was momentarily too happy to think of chiding him for that which she was absolutely certain was false.

"I am going to leave you to-day, Jude, and some of these days I am comin' back to you and make you my wife."

"Den yo' love me jes' lek yo' useter, don' yo' Punch?"

"Of course I do, you little goose."

"I'm mighty sorry fer yo' ter go 'way, Punch. I feel jes lek I ain' nuver gwine see yo' no mo'. I dre'mt tur'r night—"

But here she was interrupted by a hurried good-by kiss as Punch said:

"I ain' got time now to hear what you dreamed, but wait till next time and I'll hear it all. Still is waitin' for me. Good-by." Then he was gone.

Before she was destined to see him again both were to pass through a bitter and trying ordeal, such as make men and women stronger, forges character, and binds them together in an everlasting bond.

After the young men arrived at the station they bought their tickets and lounged about, Punch occasionally making himself known to those who had forgotten him, and who saw as they took his hand

in greeting slight resemblance in the well-groomed young man to the barefoot and ragged boy whom everybody called Punch a few years before.

"How you do, Henry?" said Punch cheerily as he slapped a young man on the back while he was rolling a truck load of chicken-coops, filled with chickens, to one end of the platform.

"Dat ain' nuttin' ter yo' how I dus," replied Henry as he hastily glanced over his shoulder at the speaker without recognizing him. "Yo' jes wait twel I put dese ole hens down, an' I'se gwine sho' yo' how ter Henry me. I wan' yo' ter un'erstan', young man, I'se mister ter yo'."

Punch laughed outright, and stepping in front of Henry, said:

"You are just as big a fool as ever, Henry. Don' you know me?"

Henry looked him full in the face, and taking him by the hand heartily said:

"Waal I be doggoned ef 'tain' ole Punch! Whar' yo' bin so long, nigger? I ain' seed yo' fer a long time, an' I sca'cely know'd who yo' wus. I thought at fus' yo' wus one er dese fresh niggers dat cum out heah fum town an' thinks dey kin run de country by deyse'ves, an' all de time dey ain' got money ter buy er brekfus'. Now ain' dat er fac'?"

Punch was obliged to admit the partial truth of his statement. Then Henry asked:

"Waal, Punch, how yo' gittin' on down dar in town? How yo' lek town enyhow? I bet yo' wouldn't cum back ter de country fer love nur'r money."

"Oh yes I would," replied Punch.

"Waal, I don' blame yo' er bit. Don' yo' tell me nuttin' 'bout er town. I ain' bin dar but onest, an' dat's nuff fer dis chicken. I ain' nuver seed how folks kin res' wid all dat fuss gwine on."

"So you don't like the towns. Then why did you leave the farm?"

"Huccom' I lef' de farm? Humph, whut yo' lef'

fer? I lef' fer de same reason yo' did, and dat wus I wus lookin' fer er shady place, an' uver since I bin heah I bin thinkin' whut er fool I wus ter prance roun' dar on de farm in de hot sun when hit jes' es cool es yo' please heah."

"What do you have to do?" asked Punch.

"What dus I have ter do? Why, ain' I de station-marster? Dat is, I is mos'. I dus all de wu'k in de office. I teks an' delivers ev'y poun' er freight, cleans de lamps, waits on de trains, ca'y de mail ter de pos'-office, an' Gawd knows whut all!"

"Then what does the agent do?"

"He ain' got much er nuttin' ter do but set back dar an' scratch lek er ol' hen wid er pen, fer li'l' while, den ryar back in er cheer, an' read de paper all day, mos'. Dat ain' nuttin' ter whut I dus."

Just at this juncture there was the echoing blast from the train as it came in sight, and the usual scramble for the platform was made by the belated passengers and others, who seemed to take delight in risking life and limb for no other purpose than to be elbowed by the crowd. Henry, as soon as the train whistled, took up its hoarse throated voice, and shouted. "Railroad, railroad!" in his official capacity, and overawed the little children from the country, who seemed to look upon him as a herald come in advance of the mighty iron horse and its train of cars.

"Well, good-by, Henry."

"So long, Punch. Tell de gals how much I love 'em down dar in Richmon', " which message so vastly tickled the risibilities of one of his dusky admirers that she gave Henry a punch in the side, and then doubled up with laughter, crying:

"Jes' lis'en how he talk. Dat nigger ain' gwine nuver do; ain' gwine *nuver do!*"

The train had barely stopped before the few passengers were aboard, and the conductor was saying sharply, " 'Board!' and it was off again. When the two young men reached Richmond they

separated, each going to his lodging, afterwards to appear at their several occupations an hour or two later.

Still yet remained a messenger in a banking institution, but Punch had seen fit to change his occupation after going to school, and was now working as agent for one of the numerous insurance companies, due to the flattering offer of the president of the company, to whom he was made known through the instrumentality of Still, who urged him to give up his menial position, as he called it, in the drug store. But at first Punch was obdurate in persistently refusing to leave Mr. Robin and the store, because he had learned to love them both; but as for the proprietor himself, he could have left without even saying good-by, for he had never learned to like him.

"You never will be anything but a porter in the store, Jim, if you stay there till you are an old man."

"That's so, because Mr. Robin's been tellin' me how hard 'tis to pass the board, whatever that is, and he never yet told me anything without me askin' him first, and he ain't never showed me a book yet. But I ain't never seen a kinder man in my life before, and I certainly do hate to leave him."

"How much do you get a week, Jim?"

"Four dollars."

"And you board, and buy your clothes with that?"

"Yes; I ain't got much to buy."

"Pshaw, boy, I gave you credit for havin' more sense than that, of makin' so little use of the learnin' you have had. Anybody can make three or four dollars a week. Let's go and see the man I told you about the other day."

Rather reluctantly Punch consented, as if conscious that in venturing upon another calling he was leaving behind the contentment and friendship he had known. However, he went, and the astounding offer almost made him doubt his ears.

"I'll give you eight dollars a week to start with,"

said the president of the insurance company, which was owned by negroes, "and if you will work hard you will make double that much." When he left, his ambition to earn a larger salary had been strengthened, and a corresponding feeling of elation and self-importance had seized him.

"Don't you think that is better than four dollars a week," Jim?"

"Yes, it's more money, but I don't know the man I'll have to work for yet," replied the non-committal Punch.

Punch, soon after this conversation, gave up his position in the store, and entered upon his duties with the insurance company. This had been only a few months before his visit home. Ever since Punch had taken his first package out from the drug store and had met the most beautiful girl he had ever seen at Mrs. Donnan's, he had been haunted by her surpassing beauty. He had never quite recovered from the fascination of his first meeting, and as frequently as he met her that overruling passion of his to possess the girl made him restless, and his inability to make love to Julia, because of his diffidence, chafed and maddened him. At night, when he ought to have been asleep, he had walked about the streets for hours, always going in the direction in which she lived. He even seemed content to walk upon the same streets that he knew she had walked on, and he would pace back and forth in the shadow of the trees at the side of the big house, hoping, perchance, he might get a glimpse of the ravishing girl.

One night he had come on his usual peregrinations, and had chanced to momentarily stop by the side entrance to do silent homage to the beauty within, when the gate suddenly opened, and who should emerge from it but this beautiful young woman, dressed in a becoming costume for the street, that so exalted her beauty that Punch stared for a moment, as if wondering whether she would not be transfigured the next instant.

"Why, it's Mr. Brooks. What are you doin' so far from home to-night, young man?"

"I just thought I would take a walk, and I was thinking of you, and that perhaps made me come by here," ventured Punch hesitatingly.

"I don't believe a word of it," she replied saucily.

"Then I won't ask you to, unless you like," said he, nettled.

She liked to tease, which we already know Punch bore badly, and after this retort there was a long pause, broken at last by Punch saying:

"Well, I must go. Good-night."

"And so must I," said she.

"How far do you go?" he asked.

"Down on Twelfth Street."

"Ain't you afraid to go so far?"

"Afraid? Afraid of what? No, I'm not afraid to go anywhere at night. I ain't no child."

"But then the looks of the thing."

"I don't care for looks; nobody's got anything to do with me."

"I'm goin' that way. Won't you—won't you let me go with you?"

"Why, I don't care, I am sure. I am not afraid to go by myself, though; you understand that, don't you?"

Punch would have seized her in his arms upon the spot had he not known he would receive a sound box on his ears if he attempted it. So, conquering the tempest of emotions that was raging within him, he gently took her arm, and they walked slowly down the street. As he felt the soft warmth of her hand, which he took advantage of as escort to hold in his, he felt transported, and was scarcely conscious afterwards of what his companion was saying, much to the latter's annoyance. She more than once reminded him of his absence of mind, and before the end of their walk she found cause to say:

"You talk mighty little, Mr. Brooks. Here I have been jabberin' by myself almost all the way. I

thought I would have a more sociable companion when I started, but you have scarcely spoken a dozen words."

"Haven't I? Well, your beauty made me forget my manners."

"But you could not see my face all the time."

"Yes, I could. When the trees hid your face I could shut my eyes and there you were, more beautiful than ever."

"What a good excuse for not talkin' to me; but I like your excuse a heap."

It is no wonder that Punch had little to say on this memorable walk, for it was the first time that he had had the opportunity to be so long with the young woman, to hear her entrancing voice. Indeed, we believe he would have been content to remain silent for the rest of his natural life could he but have heard her voice and beheld her face.

Under the fierce glare of the electric light, every toss of her dainty head, that now and then she held sidewise in her own characteristic manner, and looked at him in the sauciest way possible, was like an electric shock to the boy. In fact, the greatest wonder is that he found courage to speak even the dozen words that she said he was guilty of. While she was ultra beautiful to the not over particular Punch, she might not have been called so by the colder blooded Anglo-Saxon, for he might have found fault with the rather prominent lips, which gave her a sensuous look; then her brow was rather too low.

Julia White was the only daughter of Mary White, who herself bore claim in her youth to marvelous good looks, and at an early age had married Preston White, who, despite his name, was very black. He was an operator in one of the guano mills near the city; a fact that Mary never could endure.

After a brief period of married life they had separated, the cause of which was not generally

known, other than her unhidden objection to Preston that he "allus smells lek er guanner fact'ry." Preston refused to listen to the complaints of his wife, and in consequence she had drifted farther and farther from him, until upon one occasion he returned at an unusual hour from his work to find her in the company of a young book agent, whom he knew to be of vile reputation. He had first thought of killing him, but, believing his wife equally guilty, he bid them both leave the house, heaping upon them as they went such a flood of embittered invective as to surprise even Mary.

In vain she pleaded with him that she was innocent, but he flung her from him, and locked the door in her face. For a while she was apparently bewildered, and knew not where to go; but recovering her wits, she gave a last look of bitter hatred toward the house where she knew her husband to be, and then reluctantly left, and was not long in securing work to earn her support. After several changes she had become a housemaid for Mrs. Donnan, to whom she had told her story, of course putting the blame upon her husband, omitting entirely the cause of her domestic infelicity.

Mary died when her child was born, and the child was Julia.

It was cared for and kept in the household. As she grew older she was sent to school, and became one of the fixtures in the house. In this tragic manner Julia had made her entrance into the world, and now, as she walked along with Punch, she presented rare beauty, that one seldom sees in an admixture of Anglo-Saxon with Ethiopian blood. Her complexion was a soft olive, with a touch of color in each well-rounded and softened cheek. Her hair was as black and as glossy as a crow's wing, and in spite of her would gather itself into wavy ringlets, that made her irresistible. Her brows were highly arched, and her long, black eyelashes almost hid her eyes when she looked down, which

she had the peculiar habit of doing through eyes that were as black as her hair, and danced with the fire and deviltry that their owner possessed. Her nose was as well shaped and prominent as a Grecian's, and the mouth beset with two rows of splendid teeth, that glistened like ivory. The lips, as we have already noted, were too prominent, but a somewhat protruding chin caused one to forget this defect. The beautiful lines of her willowy figure were so nearly perfect that she might have posed as a Bacchante. The graceful poise of her head, the slender throat, and the enrapturing swell of her bosom all aroused a thrill of admiration in the men, and envy in the women, who beheld her in her might.

Her work in the house had never been heavy, and in consequence her hands had not been hardened by drudgery, so that they were very soft, and her graceful fingers were her especial admiration.

Such was this bewitching creature when Punch came to know her. She was conscious of her good looks to a degree that made the knowledge dangerous, and Mrs. Donnan, knowing this, hedged her about with restrictions, which she cared very little about.

CHAPTER XX.

SOME WILD OATS ARE SOWN.

When Julia and Punch arrived at their destination they knocked at a door opening on Marshall Street, and were presently admitted into a well-ordered and comfortable room, which was occupied by the person who opened the door. Here, for the present, we shall leave them and their affairs, and consider what effect sudden promotion has had upon Punch.

When he had been installed in his new position he at first felt that he did not earn the money that was regularly paid him each Saturday, and he often thought it but his plain duty to tell the manager so, but he did not; and as he did well whatever he attempted, he soon had an increase of pay, and he became suddenly aware that he was appreciated, and began to think there must be something in him after all.

This had a disastrous effect, and he began to assume an air that was repulsive. He spent all that he made upon himself, and his increase of leisure, since he took up his new occupation, was by no means good for him. He no longer bore the same respect for his elders, or his superiors, that he had once done. Indeed, he held none superior to himself, but as his salary grew his arrogance and self-importance kept pace, and while he attended to his duties, one who had once known him would scarcely recognize him now as the same. While Still continued to hold a certain influence over him, he no longer pretended to that he once exercised.

Punch, being at that age when all the passions are striving for mastery, and having none to be accountable to except the law, was naturally led into the mistake of giving free reign to them all by association with Still. Several times, while he was in the drug store, Still had tried to induce him to go with him, but his hours there, and his night school, forbade it, and consequently his acquaintance with the world had been deferred.

Still, however, when the opportunity presented itself, proceeded with utmost deliberation to instruct his protégé in every villainy that he himself was master of. One night, soon after his promotion, Still happened to meet him as he was going from his work, and said:

"Hello, Jim, I haven't seen you since you made a change. How do you like your new position?"

"Tolerably well; but I haven't been there long enough to tell yet."

"Where are you goin'?" asked Still.

"To supper."

"It's too late for supper, and besides, ain't you tired of boardin'-house hash yet? I am, and I take every opportunity to avoid a meal there."

Punch admitted that there was a deal of sameness in the fare, but this fact had not much disturbed him, for the very reason that he had lived for months on fried pork and bread without murmuring.

Now, Jim, I'll tell you just what to do. Come and go with me, and I will set up a supper that will astonish you. It will make your head turn round."

"But—but I can't, I ain't able."

"Able, fiddlesticks! I didn't ask you to set up the supper, I'll do that."

"But, Still, you have gone to enough trouble about me already."

"Come on, boy, come on. You are as slow as molasses in January. I am hungry. We will go down here to Rocchioli's restaurant and have supper."

So off they went.

Arrived at this notorious place, situated near the market, they entered, and walking through the saloon, redolent of liquor and bad cigar smoke, they entered a room in the rear, where they seated themselves at a table, and a waiter—a surly and over-worked negro—in his shirt sleeves appeared, and with a scornful look at Punch, which the latter did not see, said:

"Waal, gent'mens, whut kin I do fer yo'?"

He said this with such an intonation of the word "gent'mens," that Still could not but notice it, so the impudent fellow was told to—

"Go to the devil, but bring me a supper first. You know what I want. Now, hurry up."

"Look er heah, man, who yo' talkin' ter. I wan' yo' ter un'erstan' *Ise er gent'man*, an' I ain' gwine tek none er yo' foolishness."

An angry look appeared on Still's face and as he reached for his hat to go and report the impudence of the waiter to his employer, the negro disappeared, and in an incredibly short time brought forth a steaming hot supper. This served to somewhat mollify the erstwhile hot-tempered fellow, and before the meal was half consumed his placid air had returned.

When the meal was quite finished the first, by the way, that Punch had eaten in a restaurant for years,—Still ordered several bottles of beer and several cock-tails, all of which Punch partook of to that degree that the room appeared already brimming full of bottles, glasses, Stills, and furniture.

"Come, Jim, fill your glass, and drink with me."

Punch unsteadily poured a glass full of liquor, and holding it up, the brim was clinked against Still's as the latter said:

"Here's to your success in your new job, my boy; may the devil take care of his own."

Punch's brain was too muddled to lucidly comprehend what was said, but the convivial spirit pre-

vented his differing with his companion, so he replied:

"That's what I say. Ha, ha! You said you was goin' to gimme er supper ter make my haid turn round, and doggone if you didn't."

"Don't drink any more now, Jim. Come on."

"Go t' devil! I'll drink much as I please. Heah. nigger, bring me sumin' ter drink," he cried to the waiter.

"Who you callin' nigger!" said this individual, as he approached Punch threateningly.

"Shut up!" said Still sharply, as he interposed himself between the two. "Look here, young man, this is twice already you have tried to raise a row tonight. If you do so again I will break your head for you and will be pleased to pay for doin' so."

"I see you bre'kin' my haid now," muttered the waiter.

Having paid for their supper, Still ushered the half-drunken young man into the street, where the cool air of the night sobered him somewhat.

"Where do you want to go next?" asked Still of Punch.

"I don' keer whar' de debble I go, so I don' go home. I don' nuver wan' ter go home no mo'."

Under the influence of liquor his tongue had again lapsed into his former dialect.

"I don' nuver wan' ter see no mo' drug sto'es, nur insho'ance—insho'ance—I dunno whut yo' call de blame things."

"Policies."

"Dat's it, polices. No dat ain' right; whouver hyeard er insho'ance police? Why, Still, yo' mus' be drunk. I ain' nuver had sich a good time in my life."

"But where do you want to go?"

"Enywhar'. Ef hit's ter de debble I'll foller yo', Still; yo' 's de fines' feller dat uver wus, dat uver kin be."

Punch would never have believed in his sober

moments that a man that had so long befriended him would deliberately take him at his word and lead him straightway to perdition.

Still, however, for reasons that he alone knew, had watched the progress of intoxication with sardonic satisfaction, and had fully arrived at the determination that before morning he would have introduced the young man to such a night of debauch and revelry as he would never forget.

Continuing their walk, Punch became more sobered, and even mentioned something about going home.

"Why, my boy, what are you talkin' about? Goin' home now? Why, you haven't forgot your country ways yet. People don't go to bed when the sunsets in town."

"I know that as well as you, but I don't feel well, my head swims, and—"

"Hold up, hold up, be a man, Jim! Don't let a little liquor like that throw you. That's it. Now come in here and get something to pull you together."

With the clumsy motion of a scow being towed by a tug, Punch followed his friend, or the one that he believed to be such, into another liquor store, where drinks were ordered, and taken by Punch, somewhat as a medicinal remedy; but instead of having the desired effect of pulling him together, it had the opposite effect, and he felt soon afterwards that he was more helpless than ever.

Still stood sipping his julep, idly leaning on the bar rail, and watching the effect of the stimulant upon the young man.

To one who has never taken enough ardent spirit to produce intoxication, like the present novice, the first sensations experienced, as the stimulant steals away reason and lastly consciousness, are highly invigorating; to be rapidly followed by a heaviness of the eyelids, a sense of weariness in the limbs, and a desire to sleep, or to quarrel, laugh, or sing.

In the rear of this establishment was a pool and billiard-room, filled to overflowing with a motley crowd of men looking on and envying two players who were at the table.

Into this room, reeking with odors of vile tobacco and bad whiskey, they sauntered to look on. The heat, bad air, and such a combination of bad odors as Punch had never before smelled in his life, soon made the room become a confusion of lights, indistinct black faces with gleaming teeth, and eyes reddened by drink. His head was reeling, and noises that would not cease disturbed his hearing, and he kept asking somebody standing near him what the noise was, when a rough voice answered:

"Hit's dat baby haid er your'n. Yo' ain' got no biz'ness out dis late, much mo'n tryin' ter drink 'red-eye.' It'll kill yo' yit. Better lemme spen' yo' money fer yo' an' yo' go back ter er sugar rag."

This reply to Punch, spoken in a loud enough tone to be heard all over the room in spite of the din, was quite sufficient to center the laugh upon Punch, who was too tipsy to resent his speech even had he comprehended in the least what he meant.

"Is that boy troublin' you, you impudent scoundrel? Wait until you are spoken to hereafter before you speak to anybody in my charge."

"I ain' bin waitin' when I want ter talk, an' I ain' gwine wait fer er two-cen' du—"

"Yes you will, just when I tell you to!" interrupted Still in reply, permitted the sullen speaker to get a glimpse of something he habitually carried in his pocket. The sight of this, and the commanding tone of the young man, effectually silenced him, and he slunk away amid the crowd, and disappeared.

A serious fight was narrowly averted, for without the coolness of Still he and his companion might have been killed, because the location of the bar was in a notorious locality. Still, if contemptible in other characteristics, could fight when pressed to

do so, but habitually tried to avoid it. His behavior upon this occasion merited at least some applause for his daring. He was reserving Punch for other purposes than to be killed in a common brawl, for he had not gone to the trouble of seeing him elevated to a level where he might find him companionable, for philanthropic reasons, but because he fancied him. Since he had become known to Jude, and had seen Punch's relations to her, he had become fired with a passion for her. Whether of abiding love we could not assert, nor could he. Yet he did love her to that degree that he was totally at unrest after seeing her, and had mentally sworn to possess her, either by the rules of love or war.

But to return to the night. After leaving the low saloon, the two walked down the street together, both silent for awhile. Punch, being well under the influence of the liquor that he had indiscreetly swallowed, now and then looked up in Still's face, that yet remained pale, and swaying back and forth said:

"Still, yo' drunk?"

"No."

"I be doggon' ef yo' ain' drunk. Whut yo' stagger so fer den? Cyarn' I see. Whut all dat fuss 'bout down dar jes' now?"

"About you, you fool! Don't you ever meddle with anybody's business again. You might have been killed in a bat of your eye. Men have been killed in that place for less liquor than would make you drunk."

"Is dat so?" asked Punch, a look of lethargic surprise momentarily appearing upon his countenance, that had become dull and stupid.

"Yes. So after this you keep your mouth shut, and let me do the talkin'."

"All right, jes' es yo' say. Whut yo' says goes, my boy. I ain' got nuttin' to say 'g'inst orders."

Farther down the street they paused before an alley-way, between two dingy brick houses, that appeared to persons passing along the street to be

unoccupied. The room below stairs had once been used as an eating-house, but the panes had been broken from the windows, and here and there had been replaced with paper, which had been eaten away by rats, or had fallen away from dampness. One or two playbills still clung tenaciously to the window, where they had been pasted two or three years before, and had already deceived several into going to the theater on the wrong nights. The door, apparently, had been planked up to prevent boys and other persons who had no business there entering. The wood-work looked as though it had not been painted since it had been built, and the dusty brown color of the blinds, which were closed tightly, with the exception of a few slats, now and then moved by the wind, made it appear that the house was endeavoring to get a view of exterior affairs, but was too sleepy to quite get its eyes open.

Nobody seemed to own this decrepit old house, nor was it supposed to be occupied. In fact, few ever gave it a thought. It was occupied, however, and no tenant ever paid his rent more promptly, or gave his landlord less trouble, than the present occupant. As Still and Punch paused before the alley entrance, the moon-like face of the clock on the City Hall tower indicated midnight, and a distant bell could be heard tolling the hour slowly.

Still looked cautiously up and down the street, then, pulling Punch after him into the alley, said:

“Don’t make any noise, or they won’t let us in.”

“Whut?”

“Hush; don’t talk so loud, and wait till you get in before you ask questions.”

The alley was intensely dark, but when they came to the end, Still pulled a string to a latch, and the door opened softly.

“I ’clar’ fo’ Gawd I b’lieve yo’ know ev’y hole and corner er dis town. How yo’ know dat string wus dar so good?” Punch had heard the slight click of the latch.

"Been here before. Hush. Now step up, there are steps," Still commanded.

Punch made a deal more noise than pleased Still, but he said nothing until he lost his footing and fell a step or two before he caught himself, then Still said curtly:

"You blunderin' fool, why don't you stand up?"

"Ka'se my feet failed me, dat's huccom'; I cyarn' see in de dark, Still. Yo' mus' be kin' ter er cat ef yo' kin see in dis hole."

Still paid no attention to these remarks, but continued on his way upstairs. Now and then he would bid Punch make less noise, but he became more and more voluble as the drink lost its effect, so that Still had to bring him to his senses by a threat to throw him headlong down the stairs unless he did as he was told.

"Do you want to spend a year in jail?" he finally asked after his threat to throw him down stairs had lost its effect.

"Nuh, dat I don'; I ain' dun nuttin'."

"To be caught in here is the only thing you have to do."

"Le's go, den," said Punch.

"Wait; there is no danger if you keep quiet."

As he said these words Still gently tapped on the door at the head of the stairs on the third story of the house. A shutter closing a peep-hole was slid back, a word was uttered by Still, and the door was silently opened by an old negro, so crippled with rheumatism that he could not walk, but remained seated in his chair most of his waking hours. It was he who was tenant of this dilapidated old house, which he had engaged several years before for the express purpose of conducting a gambling establishment, which had been eminently successful for him, and eminently disastrous to the hundreds of young men of both races who patronized him.

He had been successful because nobody had ever been trusted with his secret except those who came

to play in his house, for he paid for everything by mail, or messenger, and his supplies, bought two or three times a year, were delivered at night. He had not set foot outside the house since he had come to live there, and his stringent rules so restrained his patrons that they feared to break them, because if ever they were violated nothing would induce him to let the offender again have the opportunity of doing so. Strict, indeed, was Unc' Joshua Tucker, for thus the boys called him, and he was as good-natured as one could desire.

"How's everything, Unc' Josh?" asked Still as he entered.

"Fine, fine. Purty night t'night, ain' hit, son?" Yo' frien'?" asked Josh as he inquisitively eyed Punch, who was most too tipsy to please him, but he made no remonstrance. Punch silently followed Still as he led the way into an adjoining room, where a bright fire was burning, and the light from several hanging lamps made the room cheerful. The air was filled with fumes of tobacco, and the hot, moisture-laden air was condensed in sweat-like drops on the window panes, that purposely had not been washed since the house had been occupied. Several players, who had been losers, appeared to have condensed moisture on their faces, too; but this was not a resort of cooling, but rather of the opposite. The practised gamesters sat through the games, caring little for anything else, and enjoying with ardor these fascinating games of chance with all their souls.

Now and then a player would lose, then a passing frown, that was gone in a moment, would manifest itself; or perhaps there would be a slight biting of the lips, while a shadow of a triumphant smile, a leering wink, or a look of scornful derision appeared when a lamb was fleeced of his small earnings.

Little talking was indulged in and beyond a greeting of "Hello, how you comin' up," and the frequent use of gaming terms, little converse was heard.

There was the rattle of dice, and occasional calls of the player as he threw the little cubes on the table; and the silent, but wily, poker players, as they proceeded to teach the youngsters with whom they played that which they would learn in no other school. Those who had been fleeced stood looking on with flushed faces, brains that were whirling with excitement, and hands trembling with desire to again venture their chances upon a certainty in the vain hope of winning. Night after night novices would return, with money secured somehow, to attempt to win from master-players, to be doomed to disappointment, and after many such attempts a mysterious suicide would close the life of one who had played repeatedly and lost. Some would continue their folly until they found that playing with old stagers was ruinous, then they would begin upon the unwary.

Still presently seated himself at a table, and play began, for he was an habitue of the place and a good player. Punch stood looking on with wonder when Still kept putting money on the table, and repeatedly had it swept off by his opponent, as he rapidly won every cent that he had with him.

"That's all," said Still as he arose from the table and turned his pockets wrong side out significantly. "Now I've got to stop. Ah, well, better luck next time. Come on, Jim, let's go. You must be a hoodoo, you black rascal, you."

"Yo' nummin' how black I is. Ef I mek yo' lose yo' luck I gwine do all I kin ter bring hit back. Try dis."

Still was only too eager to try, and he immediately returned to the enticing game, ventured the money lent by Punch, and lost.

"My luck is gone, Jim; so come on, let's go."

"I ain' gwine nowhar' twel I git my money back," answered Punch stubbornly.

"What do you mean, you blame fool! I won the money fairly, and I mean to keep it. You had

better see your friend out, Mr. Lawson, before he raises a row." This was hastily spoken by the player to whom Still had lost every cent.

"Never mind about my friend, except you must be more particular who you call fools hereafter. He means no harm."

"Co'se I don' mean no harm, co'se I don'; but I ain' no blame fool, nuther, yo' un'erstan'; I wan' yo' pertickler ter un'erstan'. Now, Still, tek dis, an' beat him; beat him lek hell." Here, after a deal of fumbling in his pockets, Punch brought forth his purse, which contained but a dollar or two, but quite sufficient to feed the fires of Still's passion for play, and gave it to him. "Now beat him," he enjoined with fervor, for Punch's fighting blood was up, and he was wrought to the pitch of caring very little what sacrifice he made, so that his champion might win.

Still took the money, as if ashamed to be humbled to the degree of borrowing money from the boy; but the chagrin that he felt at being beaten before the boy's eyes was quite too much for him, so he forgot his pride. Before seating himself, he walked around his chair, and as soon as the cards were dealt he paused to look behind him, and there stood Punch proudly looking on. Still arose in a passion, exclaiming:

"I knew it was somethin' that ruined my luck. Go sit down. Not there."

Punch meekly obeyed, not understanding at all why his looking on could do any harm; but Still thought it brought bad luck, especially since he had watched him over his shoulders.

Again Punch's last dollar was staked, and lost—

"Well, I goin' the 'whole hog,'" said Still, as he laid the purse on the table playfully. "I'll stake you this against ten cents."

"It's a bet."

This time Still won. At last his bad luck was broken, and he heaved a sigh of relief as he glanced

behind him and beheld Punch fast asleep in his chair. Still drew up his chair, and the play began again in earnest. He steadily won now until he had all the money he had previously lost, and was winning more, when Unc Josh reminded them it was broad daylight, and they had better go. Still awakened Punch, who asked as soon as he was conscious:

“Did yo’ git yo’ money back?”

“Yes.”

“Beat him lek hell?”

“Yes.”

“Den le’s go.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WILD OATS FLOURISH.

When Punch waked on the morning following the one on which he left the gaming-house with Still, he at first wondered where he could be; then, not caring, he closed his eyes and tried again to sleep to avoid thinking. His head was aching to the point of making him rush against a wall to get relief, and finding no respite in an attempt to sleep, he arose and drank the stale water in the pitcher on his washstand, and wondered if anybody ever had been so thirsty before.

Toward midday he felt sufficiently recovered to dress and go out. He was conscience-stricken, and as he walked aimlessly about he felt a sense of guiltiness that made him ashamed. He did not make an appearance at the office during the day, but instead had the good sense to remain away until he was entirely sobered. The next morning his appearance at the office was greeted by a cool nod from the manager, who was in no good humor because of Punch's sudden and unexpected absence.

"Where have you been, Jim?" he asked.

"I've been sick."

"How long have you been sick?"

"A few days."

"You didn't complain, or you might have gone off."

"Yes, I know that, but I didn't want to ask."

Punch was beginning to congratulate himself that he was indeed fortunate in giving such a plausible

and as easily-believed excuse for his absence, when the manager asked :

"Why didn't you send word you were sick? You know, as well as I do, yesterday was our busiest day of all the week, and now all your work is left undone in consequence. So get to work and catch up with it if you can. Here, attend to these policies to-day," and the manager handed him a packet of papers, and his sharp eyes saw his tremulous hand as he took them, and his averted eyes, that only momentarily looked into his. The manager's suspicions were more than aroused, and he could not help believing but that Punch had been drinking, so, desiring to warn Punch in the beginning, he said, as if speaking of some fictitious person :

"I don't like young men around me that are sickly, that stay out late at night, that spend everything they make in high livin', and if I find it out, I don't care how valuable they are, I am goin' to discharge them."

Punch thought these words were meant for him, but he agreed that he couldn't blame the manager in the least.

The long, wearisome day at last wore itself out, and after his supper he sought Still, whom he found just going out.

"Why, boy, where the devil have you been all this time?"

"I've been catching thunder, that's what. I had to lie some, but I made the boss think I was sick, that is, that I was naturally sick; but I didn't say a word about what made me sick, for I *was* sick. I never had the headache so since I was born."

"You'll get over sickness like that, and it makes you feel so good while you are gettin' so, that you won't mind it after awhile."

"Still, I didn't think you would do me like that."

"Like what?"

"Why, make me as drunk as a fool."

"You kept on calling for more liquor after I knew you had had enough, and thought yourself so rich you could treat everybody. How much money did you have left?"

"Not a cent, and even my pocket-book was gone."

"Gone where?"

"Stolen, I suppose," replied Punch.

"No, you lent it to me down there at old man Josh's place, with all the money in it, on purpose to beat that fellow at poker who had won every cent I had. Don't you remember?"

"No, I don't remember anything, except goin' into more barrooms than I could count; and then my legs got weak, my head was turnin' roun' so fast that I didn't know where I was nor what I was doin'. I surely do think hard of you for makin' me so drunk, Still."

"You're a fool, boy, if you think I am the cause of your drunkenness. Did I hold you and force the liquor down your throat? Did I?"

"You didn't exactly do that, but then you know I had not been used to drinkin', and you could have stopped me before I made a hog of myself."

"To hell with what I know!" said Still sharply, his evil nature at last finding vent in words that sounded strange to Punch's ears. "What have I got to do with how much liquor you drink, or how drunk you get? You are old enough now to know when to stop, or you will never know."

"Why—why, don't get mad with me, Still. I know 'twas my fault, but I never had been drunk before, and it made me so ashamed of myself. Don't get mad with me."

"I am not mad with you; but, you little innocent child, I don't like to be blamed for making one your age drunk. You provoked me, that was all."

When Punch saw that Still was mollified, he felt better.

"Come on, let's have a beer as a peace offerin'," said Still as they neared a saloon.

The beer was produced by a slovenly bar-keeper, and they drank it. Punch was already coming to like the seductive beverage, and the plans that Still was laying for the lasting ruin of Punch were working slowly, but very, very surely.

"Did you ever see a genuine society ball, Jim?"

"No—that is, unless you call those we have up homie balls."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Still. "Why, boy, they are no more alike than—than I am like one of those country codgers." And Still drew himself up and surveyed his figure with satisfaction as he passed a window. "If you want to have a good time, come and go with me. If you have never seen good dancin', you will see it there."

"But I haven't got any clothes fittin'."

"You can hire a dress-suit for the night, from Stien's, down on Broad Street, just like I do."

"When is it goin' to be?" asked Punch.

"Next Friday night, at Johnson's Hall, on Second Street, and the best blood in Richmond will be there, too. The grand march will be led off by Jim Canady, the best dancer I ever did see off the stage, and Miss Julia White."

"What!" exclaimed Punch, with the suddenness of having been pierced to the heart by the mention of that name. "Do you know her?"

"Why, what's the matter? here is nothin' strange about knowin' Julia White. Do you know her?"

"Yes—that is, I have seen her."

"She's a fine-lookin' girl, but as fickle as the wind."

"Then you must know her well," said Punch.

"No; only a few months ago I met her, and I have not seen her a half dozen times in my life, but I have heard that she usually has her way about everything, and when made mad she cares little what she says or does."

"Is that so?" said Punch inquiringly.

"I don't know, except from hearsay; but I do know she is one of the liveliest, smartest, and most beautiful women in this town."

"I know that, but I had almost as soon be dead as for that girl to get mad with me."

"Pshaw, you haven't got the heart to step in and make them love you whether they will or no. They don't try to play too long with me, for they soon see that I will not stand it, and they quit. However, you are young yet. Age will probably make you more audacious."

How Punch envied Still the audacity, in which he was lacking; and he was already burning with jealousy because of what he had heard about the beautiful Julia being so great a favorite with the young men.

"Then you would like to go to the ball next Friday night, eh?"

"I don't know, I reckon so; if I haven't got anywhere else to go."

The negro rarely expresses an eager desire to do anything, and the reader might infer from his speech that Punch was not very anxious to go; on the contrary, he was very eager. Nothing arouses a negro's pride so much as a love of outward display, and Punch was no exception to this weakness.

Still and Punch had secured evening suits on the night of the ball, and Punch had, with a great deal of instruction from Still, dressed himself in it; but afterward felt so stiff that for hours he was not comfortable in his transmogrifying suit; nor did he cease, during the whole evening, looking for the missing portion out of either side of his coat.

They reached the hall just as the orchestra began playing the opening march, and Still said:

"Hurry up, or you'll be too late to see the grand march."

Giving two tickets to the doorkeeper, they entered the hall.

The room was brightly lighted, the glistening

floor shone in the light like ice, and the hum and buzzing of many voices made such a confusion that Punch was so occupied looking upon the enlivening scene that he had to be pulled along by Still to an advantageous position where a better view of the dancers might be had.

Never before had Punch seen so many splendidly-dressed people, and it was his constant fear lest he might tread upon some of the long silken trains, the fear of which made him exceedingly awkward. Presently there was a hush of voices, and then suppressed announcements from several of "Here they come!" The orchestra burst forth in one great blast of melody, and Punch, looking, saw Julia, accompanied by Jim Canady, coming slowly up the long room. How glorious, how regal she looked! Punch had never seen her so handsome nor so dazzling as now. He saw nobody else but her, and was probably in that delightful state of exaltation that we oftentimes attain in dreams, for he simply stood still and stared at the girl. When she came near where they stood she recognized him, and gave him a most wicked wink of recognition as she passed.

Her rich black hair was gracefully entwined about her head, and in it she wore a gorgeous red rose. Her soft olive cheek was bedimpled with a very bewitching smile, and her merry laughter was such that Punch forgot the march, forgot the ball, forgot everything but Julia, and how miserably jealous he was of that fellow by her side. In fact, Punch was foolishly so, for he had no claims upon the girl, because he was scarcely well acquainted with her. Yet his envious eyes followed every gesture of her companion, and when he looked at her and smiled, which was hatefully frequent to Punch, he could have strangled him like a dog for his impudence. How this sight of Julia fired that passion in him, sensual if you like, instead of that pure love that Jude held for this young man. He thought of

little else, nor could he think, and the more he tried to quiet his tumultuous feelings, the more miserable he became. The dance presently ceased, and Still and Punch sought to speak with Julia.

She was seated, when they found her, and several young men had gathered about her, and she was doing her utmost to talk to all at once.

“Why, you don’t know an old friend to-night,” said Still, addressing her.

“Oh yes I do. I spoke to you before, that is, I nodded to you; but your friend Mr. Brooks, there behind you, thought it meant all for himself. Now didn’t you, young man?”

“Yes, I thought you spoke to me. I didn’t know you meant anybody else, or I wouldn’t have bowed to you,” replied Punch independently, thrusting his hands in his pockets and looking exceedingly confused as the handsome woman before him burst into a laugh that was exasperatingly musical, even to Punch, at whose expense it was.

To more refined ears that laugh might have been an index to its owner’s character. It was loud, therefore coarse; provoked at another’s discomfort, therefore its owner was selfish. It began with giggling, which announced her frivolous nature; and besides that it had that indescribable intonation that is impossible to describe in language, but which experience has taught us to belong to shallow natures, persons devoid of feeling, and heartless sycophants. Whatever prompted her to do so, nobody can tell, but after a few commonplace remarks she suddenly asked Punch:

“Do you dance, Mr. Brooks?”

“Yes—that is—yes, at home,” stammered the confused young man, taken so by surprise that he was hardly conscious of what he said.

“Oh, well, if you can dance at home, you can dance here just as well, can’t you?”

“I suppose so,” replied Punch.

“Then you must dance the next waltz with me.”

"Whew!" whistled the young men about her in a chorus. Still said nothing, but smiled disdainfully at the whim of Julia, and looked amusedly at Punch, who was so unprepared for the girl's request that an interval elapsed before he answered—too long, entirely, to escape her notice, and she, finding especial delight in badinage, tortured him additionally by saying:

"Can't you make up your mind whether you will grant my request, Mr. Brooks? All these rascals here are dyin' to dance with me, but I know you can beat them all. What do you say?"

"I say that I will be very much obliged," answered Punch.

He could scarcely utter the words, his mouth was so dry, and he was so delighted; but the favor was too great to be lost. He was conscious of his deficiency in waltzing, but he thought to make up for his lack of grace by assurance, which he possessed to an alarming degree.

"Now go!" she said to those about her. But even if they went, others came to take their places, so that Punch had scarcely spoken to her before the music of the waltz began. The soft, seductive strains aroused in the blood of this handsome woman those latent fires of passionate love, and with the awakening of these instincts she could tangibly feel the impulse to burst through every restraint and abandon herself to a season of orgie and riot, and to drink deeply of that for which her nature longed.

Jim Canady had excused himself for some reason or other, and had been delayed in returning, and upon doing so he found that Julia was engaged for the dance. Turning upon Punch, whom he did not even know, he said in a rage:

"You little upstart of a black scoundrel, what do you mean? What do you mean?"

"Mean? Mean by what?"

"You know well enough what I mean. I turn my back, and you little boys come trottin' round here

'thout askin' anybody. What you got to do with this young lady? What you got to do with her? That's what I ask you?"

"That's none of your business, you meddlin' rascal! Miss Julia asked me to dance, and I said I would be glad to do so."

"You lie like a dog, she didn't! Did you, you Julia? Answer me that."

"Yes," coolly replied Julia; and added, "and even if I did, what have you got to do with me? You are not my master." And she snapped her finger at him.

"You lie, to keep me from threshin' him, but—"

A sudden sweep of Punch's arm suddenly arrested further speech just here on the part of Jim, as the bare fist of Punch broke his nose and bespattered their immaculate shirt fronts with blood.

The sudden assault of Punch took the young man so much by surprise that he lay stunned, prone upon the floor.

"You are the blamedest fool I ever saw!" announced Still as he pulled Punch away and tried to get him out of the building before some meddler informed the police.

Knowing that an officer was on the square in front of the house, Still hurried along the recalcitrant and hot-headed young man, who protested against such protection.

"I tell you, Still, I won't go another step. I haven't done anything to be arrested for, and if I have I ain't afraid to be."

"Oh, come on; don't stop here. You will be seen and arrested, and then you will have to appear in the police court; then what will your boss say?"

"I don't care what he says. I did right, and I would do just the same again. That fool, Jim Candy you call him, thinks 'cause he can dance a little bit he can run over me. I reckon what he got by callin' Julia a lie before everybody will show him a thing or two."

"You will show everybody that you are a fool for puttin' your mouth into other folks' business, you mean. What business did you have to strike Jim there before everybody, spoil a night's fun, and almost break up the entertainment?"

Punch snatched his arm away from Still's grasp, and stood before him, his eyes fairly blazing with indignation at the infamy of such a question.

"Well, I'll be hanged if I believe you are Still Lawson, when I hear you ask such a fool question!"

The two had before this found their way to the street through a rear exit from the hall, and walked briskly off. They had not gone far when Punch was brought to a standstill by the question of Still.

"What did I have to do with Julia?"

Yes, what? You did not bring her to the ball, Jim Canady did, and when he found she was lyin' to him, he said so."

"What! Still, mind what you are sayin'. You know Julia asked me to dance with her, and now do you mean to say she didn't? If you do, you lie!"

"Hold on, hold on, my hot-headed chap. I didn't say any such thing; I didn't say that she lied at all, but that Jim found that she had, or himself supposed so, and on the strength of this supposition he accused her of falsehood. Of course you had nothin' to do with this, for the reasons I have already given."

"The devil I didn't! You must think I haven't got the grit of a craw-fish. You reckon I'm goin' to stand there and hear a girl like that called a liar, and not make somebody smart for it. Humph, you ain't the man I thought you was, Still."

"But you scarcely knew the girl. She came with Jim, and he can say that she lied just as often as he pleases, and I haven't got anything to do with it."

A look of disappointment came upon Punch's face on hearing these words, and he returned:

"If I had never seen her before, and a man had spoken to a girl who had promised to dance with

me like that, I would have knocked him down, all the same, just as I did that scoundrel Canady."

"Yes, and get into a peck of trouble for your pains."

"That's all right, I ain' goin' to let nobody run over me; nor anybody I got anything to do with. I tell you what, let's go back to the ball," said Punch, as he thought of the ignominy of flying to avoid arrest.

But Still strenuously objected to his doing so, saying:

"You go there and you'll be arrested sure."

"And if I don't go I will be called a coward, to strike a man and then run away. You can go where you please. I'm goin' back there just as soon as I change my shirt."

He stepped into a store, bought that which was necessary, and asked leave to make the change, which was granted. He presently emerged from the store, immaculate, and walked away. Still accompanied him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MADNESS OF YOUTH.

Jim Canady, on arising from the floor, where Punch's sudden assault had laid him, immediately gave mouth to imprecations infinitely too vile to print. His mouth foamed with rage, and the foam, intermingled with blood from his nose, made him horrible to look upon.

In the twinkling of an eye his right hand went behind him, and several, knowing what the action meant, cried: "Don't shoot! Stop him! Stop him!" Before he could withdraw his hand it was caught in the grasp of one of his friends, who said:

"Stop, Jim, think what you're 'bout. Put your gun up and come with me."

"Go to the devil, every one of you. I'm not goin' anywhere. I paid my money to come in here, and here I'm goin' to stay. Turn me loose, you blamed fool, or I'll burn you presently."

After a deal of persuasion and urging they managed to get him to go out and make himself presentable, promising that he should return, just as if he had been a child, so enraged had he become.

When he had been removed, and those of the crowd present (many of whom had sought the outer air, for the time being, to await developments) found their tongues, one could scarcely hear a thing for the confusion. One or two women had fainted, and a zealous fellow had secured a bucket containing beer in lieu of water, which he could not immediately lay hands upon. With this he had inundated one of the unconscious victims with quite

a sufficiency to make her still more profoundly oblivious to her surroundings had he poured it down her throat; but luckily most of it went into her face and corsage, and she promptly gave a shout and opened her eyes.

During this turmoil Julia did not appear to be perplexed, much less to have any inclination to faint. She had watched with infinite delight the way Punch had punished Jim Canady for his insolence, and it made an impression upon her that she would not readily forget. She was proud of him. Nobody present took up her cause so quickly nor resented the insult so well. She thought she was beginning to love this boy. Yes, "boy" she called him, for she was older than he. At first she did not consider him seriously, but in one of her whimsical moods she choose to dance with him, and indeed found him to be very much more to her liking during the last hour. She was, however, somewhat chagrined because he had gone away without any explanation to her.

During the stay of Jim Canady in the room she had villified him in the severest terms, which that individual appeared to mind so little that he scarcely noticed her.

"I'm glad of it, you dog. You dare to call me a lie; and I wish he had broken your hateful neck, you coward. Because I choose to come with you to this dance, doesn't mean that I give you the right to say what I shall do. I'm not responsible to you, nor nobody. To nobody! Get out of my sight, you villian; and Mr. Brooks will come presently, and I will get him to put you out. He is the only man that appears to have been here to-night, and I'm goin' to wait for him to dance with me. No, you fool," this to a young blood who sauntered up and asked in a voice burdened with affectation if he might have the pleasure of dancing the next set with her. He informed her that everything was quiet, and the music would presently start.

"I want to dance with a man, one who can defend a woman when she is insulted, and punish her insulter. Had you done this you might have had some claim for consideration," she retorted.

"But—but, I was not near enough to you to resent the insult like Mr.—Mr.—"

"Never mind his name; say what you are goin' to, I know who it is."

"I just say, simply, that I was across the room when I saw Mr. Canady fall, and saw that young fellow pulled hurriedly away."

"Rather a convenient place when danger is nigh, and fightin' is to be done, ha, ha! No, sir; I don't care to dance this time. I'll rest, and watch the others."

Before the number had been danced, she was pleasantly surprised to hear a voice behind her say:

"I'm so sorry, Miss Julia, to miss the dance you promised me, but you will give me the next, won't you?"

"Maybe so," she said, with one of those fetching little laughs that set Punch on fire, and made him thrill from head to foot. She watched the young man, and with the intuition of a coquette knew that her influence over him was strong, and momentarily becoming stronger.

"Yes, I'll promise to dance with you, if you will likewise make me a promise. Will you?"

"I don't know what it is," answered Punch.

"Nothing much, only will you promise?" she asked again, this time with a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

"Yes," he ventured, wondering all the time what it could be.

She leaned over toward him, put her hand upon his shoulder, the touch of which made him excessively proud, and her head came nearer and nearer, and still nearer, until he smelled the delicious perfume which she had about her, and the pleasant warmth of her breath was upon his cheek; and as

he caught a view of her merry face with those twinkling eyes, he thought he had never been so delighted. Then she said in a gentle whisper:

"You won't knock my escort down again if he comes back, will you?"

"Not if you ask me; certainly not."

"That's right. Poor fellow, how hard you must have struck him," said she, as she laughed at remembrance of the surprised look upon Jim's face as he fell.

"Then you are sorry for him?" asked Punch.

"You are mightily mistaken. I wish you had knocked out an eye or two, and half of his teeth down his vile throat. You had better look out, or he will kill you. He never goes anywhere unarmed, and to-night he might have shot you had he been permitted to draw his pistol."

"Don't you worry about me, Miss Julia; I'm not scared."

"I know that, but I want to put you on your guard."

Punch bowed his thanks, and the music began. The two took their places in the dance, and Punch forgot again that he was doing aught but dancing with the divine Julia, nor did he care.

"Now jes' look at dat brazen gal. She ain' got no mo' heart dan er piece er wood. Her tur'r partner dun bin knocked down an' heah she dancin' er r'ady wid de man dat dun hit. Waal, seh, ef dat don' beat my time," remarked a spectator, whose physical condition, due to fat, forbade her the dance, so she gave full rein to criticism of the dancers, and to finding fault with everything in general, which seemed to console her somewhat, since the pleasure of enjoying it in person was denied.

"Dat's so," agreed her companion, who happened to be no longer young, and consequently went begging, and agreed to everything that could be said against young people and their forward ways.

"Lawson, that young friend of yours has more assurance than a man twice his age. Let him keep on and he'll either have a broken head or a bullet hole through his body," remarked an acquaintance of Still's.

"Oh, he's young yet. I've told him to attend to his business, and you see how he profits by my advice. He'll learn yet, even at the price of a broken head, as you say."

"By the way, that's a devilish fine woman he's with. Who is she?"

"That's Julia White, and she's devilish too; you are right on that score. That woman could almost be what she pleased, but she prefers to remain as she is. She has had numerous offers of marriage; but while her admirers are as plentiful as flies around a lump of sugar she refuses them all, without any reason that I know of."

"But she is young yet. She will become more sobered as she grows older."

"The devil you say! Sober! Did you ever know a drunkard to become sober by drinkin'?"

"No."

"Then you won't see this young woman anything more ten years from now than she is at present. In fact, she will be worse. Watch what I tell you. I have seen the tricks that this woman has played upon other young men, and I have known of their frenzy when aware of her perfidy. Yet they persist in their folly, and that young fool yonder will presently awaken to find that he, too, has been this woman's plaything. Let her have full sway, she will soon come to the length of her tether, and then I'll see what I can do. Other young men have found out their folly after spending everything they have made on this woman, and when no longer able to humor her caprices they have been forgotten."

"Why, Lawson, the woman is too young to know so much about the world."

"Too young, yes; but old in a full knowledge of

the means of wheedlin' men into becomin' slaves to her. I say, when I think my opportunity ripe, I shall teach this young woman such a lesson as she will never forget. Till now I have never given her an opportunity to fling me aside. When I do give her the opportunity I am goin' into the fight determined to break her or to be broken.

"I admit I like the girl, but I have a passin' love for every woman, or perhaps you had better say passion. But this girl has put me on my mettle, and I am firmly made up in my mind as to the course I shall pursue. Every time I look upon those splendid shoulders of hers that are held up like a soldier's, her fine bosom sufficient in itself to lead a fellow to perdition, and the graceful and sense-torturin' outlines of her glorious figure, which is so wonderfully manifested when she is dressed in these close fittin' dresses that she seems to prefer to all others, I tell you I feel almost tempted to forfeit body and soul to possess a woman like her, Robinson."

"And I am almost tempted to do likewise when I hear your description of her."

"That is not all. Watch her, look at the voluptuous and willowy bendar' of her graceful figure as she dances, and then at her eyes, which are dreamily half-opened, as if soothed to a sensuous sleep by the sound of the music as those soft airs are played."

"Stop, stop! Lawson, don't go on. Another word and I might have to fight your friend that I might have the opportunity of dancin' with her," said Robinson good humoredly.

"Would you like to know her?"

"Would I? Don't ask me; you know I would."

"Then come along. The music will stop soon, and I'll introduce you; but, Robinson, not a word to anybody about what I've said."

"Of course not. I promise you I won't breathe a breath of it to anybody."

The music ceased, and the hum of voices was

again audible when they came to where Punch and Julia stood. Young Robinson had the opportunity to become acquainted with Julia, much to Punch's dislike, for she already knew too many men to please him, and he was much disgruntled when Still presented him.

As the night grew older the effects of stimulants, imbibed on the sly, began to be manifest in the queer behavior of some of the men, and even the women, present. Those affected by it became querulous or hilarious, as it affected the individuals variously, and the noise became louder and louder, until it became evident that a fight between several was imminent, and Still thought it the better part of wisdom to go before the storm burst. Punch, however, was not of his opinion, and being reinforced in his obstinacy by several imbibitions, in company with Julia, he stubbornly resisted, and insisted that Still was afraid of his shadow.

Presently there was a hush, as if everybody present had scented something wrong, and then a rush of feet through the doorway leading to the room below, and hurried cries of:

"Stop him! Stop him! For God's sake, stop him!"

"He'll kill somebody!"

"Where's that black infernal puppy?" Jim Canady was heard to exclaim as he rushed swiftly to the part of the room in which Punch and Julia were. He had caught sight of them, and maddened to frenzy by the effect of a quantity of liquor given him by his companions with the hope of making him harmlessly intoxicated, and by a remembrance of the insult offered previously, he was determined in his effort to kill the man who had insulted him.

Before he could be stopped, the pistol was fired, for few dared to lay hands upon him, and everybody sought a place of safety, and every exit became blockaded. Women shrieked and fainted, and men fell over and trampled under foot others to find a

place of safety. The utmost confusion reigned, and had the house been on fire it could scarcely have been worse. There was a louder shriek as the pistol report died away, as if somebody had been hurt. It was Julia who shrieked, but she was unharmed. Nevertheless, she had seen Jim Canady fire so close upon Punch that she was sure he had been shot through. She was mistaken, for Punch had been quick enough to dodge, and Jim's aim had been unsteady, consequently the bullet flew harmlessly by, and slightly singed the ear of the fat person who had not danced, but who was now doing her best to escape. As she felt the sharp sting of the shot, and heard the noise of it, she exclaimed angrily to a man near, whom she supposed to have struck her:

"Name er Gawd, man, whut yo' keep prodjikin' lek dat fer?"

"I ain' hit yo', dat wus a bullet. Look! dar hit in de wall."

For indeed, there it was, buried in the plastering. She, in the most approved manner, gave such a shriek that made those present pause and wonder what new calamity had been visited upon the ball, and then she fell in one immense heap on the floor, for she had fainted.

Punch did not wait for a second shot from his enemy, but, with head down like an enraged bull, he rushed upon the fellow, and in the twinkling of an eye had wrenched the pistol from the grasp of the drunken man and tossed it across the room. They clasped each other, and both fell on the floor. Both were strong, and the fight grew desperate. In vain did some try to separate them, but they were as tenacious as bull dogs. Over and over they rolled on the floor, first one and then the other on top. The effect of drink was beginning to tell on Canady, for he soon began to show signs of exhaustion, while Punch took advantage of his weakening, and getting him undermost, he seized him by the throat and choked him, choked him until his

face grew red, then purple; his eyeballs protruded, and his tongue came out of his mouth its full length, and his breath stopped. Onlookers fled, or turned their heads, fearing to see him die.

"Pull him away! Pull him away, I say, you gapein' fools; don't you see he is killin' him!" shouted Still.

Several, overcome by fright, but needing only somebody to direct them, rushed forward and dragged Punch away bodily.

They were just in time, for bloody foam was beginning to appear at the wretched fellow's lips, and when Punch's powerful grasp upon his adversary's throat was released life appeared to be extinct. It was not long, however, before he began to breathe better, and then to stare blankly at those about him from his blood shot eyes, as if wondering where he was. One of his friends said to him:

"You're all right, Jim; you'll be yourself presently."

"Go t' hell, every last one of you! I know I'm all right. Any fool can see that. Where's that black devil. Did I kill him?"

"No," replied a voice near him," but he came durn near chokin' your wind off."

"Go t' the devil! Nobody asked you," growled Jim, as he turned ferociously upon the speaker, who cowardly slunk away.

"Do you think it's time to go now?" sarcastically asked Still of Punch, as the latter stood nervously arranging his clothes after the tumbling they had received.

"Just as you say," was the reply.

"I'm in no hurry," replied Still, "but since you have found so much to fight about, I think that will be enough to last awhile. We had better go, unless you want to air your excuses in the police court to-morrow mornin'."

"It makes little difference whether I'm taken here or at the house. They will take me, so the

quicker the better," and suiting the action to his words, he was starting off to make his offense known to the police, when Still stopped him by saying:

"Jim you are the biggest fool I know, to have as much sense as I know you to have. Haven't you got any reason? Don't you know enough to know that if you will keep your mouth to yourself, and get away from here, that Jim Canady will let the matter drop, even if he is arrested for shootin'? He knows, although he doesn't know now probably, because he is full of liquor, but he will know, that his offense carries a heavy punishment along with it, and if he is arrested no charge will be pressed against you. You had better make up your mind about leavin', or else the police will be here. They will see your torn clothes and crumpled shirt and will at once count you as an offender."

The horror of figuring in a court trial, which had been impressed upon the young man from childhood, and the thought of disgrace it would bring upon himself and his people was too much to bear, and yet he felt that he was flying like a coward; all of which wrought upon the feelings of this unsophisticated young man, and made him very uncomfortable. Persuasion on the part of Still, however, finally induced him to go. Before taking his departure he told Julia of his regret at being the cause of the disturbance.

"But," said he, "I hope you think I did right when I punished this fellow as he ought to have been. I am afraid had I been armed I would have killed him."

"I not only am glad that you resented his insolence, but I am almost sorry that you did not kill him outright. Don't think a moment that I am mad with you, for you couldn't have pleased me better than in doin' just as you did." And she gave him one of those encouraging smiles which he would have gone the length of the world to obtain.

He forgot the danger he had undergone, he forgot his bruises, he even forgot that Still was upbraiding him for his folly, because he was thinking of Julia, of her merry eyes, and the little laugh that was as light as sea foam. He was repeating her last words, and saying to himself, "She said that to me, me—black and ugly as I am!" This aloud, "By George, I feel too happy to live!"

"Then you ought to die, after what has happened to-night. If ever I regret doing a thing it is bringin' you here," said Still angrily.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Punch.

"I mean that I have made a fool of myself, and you an ass of yours, by your performance."

"That's all right. Go home with Julia, Still. I told her that I was sorry that I could not."

CHAPTER XXIII.

EASY TO LEARN, BUT HARD TO FORGET.

The next morning after the events of the night just recorded in the last chapter, Punch arose, and dressed himself jauntily, as if he had not been concerned in a quarrel in all his life. When he appeared at breakfast he was just a little bit red-eyed and morose, but otherwise was as usual, and apparently far less worsted from the effect of his night's dissipation than might have been expected. So lightly did its effect upon him appear, that he failed to excite any comment from the "boss," and after a day's hard work he went home, if his boarding-house could be called such.

That was just it. How he longed for a home where he knew somebody cared whether he lived or died. He had grown tired of such a life, but not knowing a solution of the matter, he sought companionship in Still; and this was one reason why he was being gradually taught the ways of the world, which presently would be so difficult to unlearn. He loved Still with more devotion than a brother, because, had he not done more for him than any brother he possessed? He loved, even revered him, as a model, and aspired to being his equal sometime in the remote future. Whatever Still did he would try to think right. If he knew it to be wrong, he overlooked and condoned it. In consequence he was pliable stuff in the hands of this unscrupulous fellow, who was selfish, brutal, and cruel whenever he became entangled by his own machinations; and whenever such happened, he sought to shift his bur-

den of iniquity upon innocent and unwary shoulders, and laugh at their predicament.

After getting his supper, Punch walked around to Still's house. Still seemed glad to see him, for he said as he met him at the door:

"Why, my boy, I thought you would have been laid up for a week after last night's frolic. Come in."

"Humph," and Punch smiled grimly, and seemed somewhat abashed as he recalled the scolding he had received the night before. "I thought you were mad with me, the way you talked last night; but I tell you now I won't take back a thing I said or did, 'cause I know I was right."

"I know you were right. But let me tell you, people don't knock one another down in the ball-room, and behave as if they were at a prize fight."

"Yes, and they don't go there to hear ladies they know called liars, either."

"I know that as well as you do, but you could have waited until the ball was over, and could have taken him to task for the insult."

"The devil you say! Stand there and hear a woman you know called a liar, and not knock the fellow down? G'way, Still, I know you. If you had heard that fellow like I did, you would have done just the same."

"Blamed if I would. I didn't have a thing to do with Jim Canady's girl, and as long as she was in his care he could call her anything he pleased. I wouldn't have anything to do with it. If you stay in this town much longer you will find it best to do as I tell you."

Punch could not agree with his friend, but the difference of opinion did not warrant him in saying what he thought. He therefore changed the subject, and inquired:

"How did you and Julia get along last night?"

"Fine. She didn't go home, but we walked down

to her friend's house on Twelfth Street, where she spent the rest of the night."

"Why, that is strange. Twelfth Street is just as far as Mrs. Donnan's. What did she go there for?"

"How do I know? Maybe it was because it was late, and she might have disturbed those at home."

"But she would disturb her friend on Twelfth Street just as well, wouldn't she?"

"I know that, too; but you see Florence Banks and Julia have been friends a long time, and she would do almost anything to please her."

"That's so, I forgot. Well, I am glad she got out of that scrape without being hurt last night."

"I know, but Jim very nearly hit you, and he did slightly graze the ear of old Nancy Brown, who fell out just as if she had been shot through the heart. You saw her, didn't you?"

"No, I can't say that I did."

"You missed the fun, then, if you didn't see that fat woman fall just as Jim fired. I know you must have been blind then. She thought she was killed, and I could not help laughin' at her. Have you heard what happened after we left last night?"

"No; what?"

"Well, Robinson told me that after we had gone several officers made their way into the room and arrested Jim Canady and several others, and that they resisted, and were severely clubbed by the officers before they would go along. Findng resistance useless, they gave up. I see too by the paper to-day that Jim was fined for bein' disorderly, but no charge of shootin' was entered against him, and to-night he is free again. I told you so. Had he brought you into the affair the shootin' would have been established, and he would have suffered by his folly. You are lucky, my boy; but you have made him your enemy, and I tell you Jim Canady will wait, and when he gets a chance he will pay you back for last night's work; so keep a look out for him."

"Humph, I ain't afraid of him, and he knows me well enough now not to bother with me."

"Don't be too sure about that. He is as sly as a fox, and if you don't keep a sharp eye on him he will kill or ruin you at the first opportunity."

"Pshaw, Still, you talk like an old woman. Here I have lived in the city only a few years, and I'll bet my old hat that I can tell you what Jim Canady will do the next time I see him."

"Well, what will he do?"

"He will say that I served him right, and that he did not blame me for what I did."

"And you will be fool enough to believe what he tells you, I suppose."

"Why, of course. It is a flat confession that he was wrong and I right."

"Well, you had better not believe a thing he says, not if he swore and kissed a stack of Bibles from here to the sky! I know him, and this is my advice: Keep clear of him; have nothing to say to him, much less do with him. Heed what I tell you, and keep out of trouble."

"Go on, Still! Keep your advice. I can take care of myself, I think you have seen enough to convince you of that. If Jim Canady chooses to mend the wrong he has done, I will meet him halfway. I'm no chicken-hearted boy, afraid of his shadow."

"Very well. If you get into difficulties, don't say that I didn't warn you."

Several weeks had elapsed after this conversation, and in the meantime Punch had not lost an opportunity to become more intimately acquainted with the world. Like a child with a new toy he found unending novelty in being introduced to the various devitalizing pastimes that city folks frit away their time with. And each work-day seemed interminably long, and the nights immoderately short, for his indulgence in them.

Upon one occasion he and Still had gone out together. It was a Saturday evening, and Punch had

been paid his month's salary. After several hours spent at the theater, they had supper. After several hours more of drinking and ribaldry they proceeded with the characteristic folly of youth to the gaming quarters of Unc' Josh, determined to spend the remainder of the night in play.

Arrived there, Punch was more careful in entering the old house, for he had become an habitual visitor for several weeks past, with, of course, the expected result, and that was to at first have his wings severely singed before he had learned to play well. Later on, however, he had become an excellent poker player, and even the old stagers began to find excuses for not playing with him. While he had lost sufficient money at playing crap to forever forbid his playing that enticing game again, yet he persisted with poker in spite of his losses, and later played better and began to win.

When the two young men entered the room, those present scarcely looked up or paid any attention to them. Everybody seemed absorbed in the outcome between the players, just as they had been that time when Still played and lost so constantly during Punch's first introduction into the house. A considerable pile of coin and notes composed the pot, on which many present looked with longing and greedy eyes. Presently one of the players showed his hand, and a look of exultation flitted over his features for a moment as he raked the money toward him. There was a look of despair on the face of the player opposite, for he had ventured everything he had, and had lost. The losing player was none other than Jim Canady. As soon as he caught sight of Punch, his face took on a ferocious look, and his teeth clinched so tightly that the great muscles of his jaw stood out prominently. The look of ferocity was as fugitive as could be for the next moment he was speaking to him.

"I am sorry, Brooks, I made such a fool of myself

at the ball that night. Brooks is your name, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Well, you see I was naturally put out when I found Julia had made an engagement with you after I had gone to the trouble to attend to a matter for her. But you know, young man, or you will know, that women are a deceitful set, and it will never do to always depend on what they say. I thought Julia was playin' with me, and it made me mad. You did exactly right, for I spoke too quickly. When I shot, I shot to kill you, but you know the boys kept on makin' me drink until I was crazy, and I forgot everything but that I had been insulted. When I had time to think the matter over, I thought I had done you wrong."

"Why didn't you come and say so, then?"

"Because I was too proud, that's why. Now I have lost every dollar I had with me, and I must go. Luck is against me, and it's no use playin' against luck," and Jim Canady turned to go. He had not gotten across the room before Punch's sympathy overcame him, and he caught up with him, saying:

"Why, man, hold up your head. You have lost money, but you will win again. Come on, I'll play with you. As for that little business the other night, I might have been wrong myself somewhat, but I am hot-tempered. But let us forget it. Come on. There, deal the cards."

Jim reluctantly took the cards, and sat down at the table. Punch sat opposite. Still warned him by a shake of the head, but he paid no attention, but smiled derisively as he took up his hand, and soon was oblivious to his presence altogether.

"But hold on, I can't play. All of my money is at home, and I lost all I brought in the last game," announced Canady.

"That ain't nothin'. There, give me a due bill for

that," and he flung a five-dollar note across the table. The due bill was given and the play began.

Punch won the whole of the loan, and again accepted Jim's due bill. Whether it was intentional on the part of the latter to so constantly lose, or whether his misfortune, we are not sure, but it might have been intentional, just as the rope-walker blunders at first to better exhibit his skill afterward by comparison. At any rate, Punch had congratulated himself somewhat over his almost constant winnings, and was beginning to think his opponent a poor player compared with himself. Indeed, he felt to that degree complaisant that he could have continued the game indefinitely. Presently, however, he began to lose. At first slowly, then almost every game was won by Jim Canady. With feverish and quivering hands he again and again brought out his earnings, until at last all was gone. The due bills had long since been paid. When his money was all gone, he heaved a sigh of relief, saying:

"That's all. But you won it fairly, old man; and I can't say a word. Better luck next time maybe."

"But wait. Here, you ain't goin' out yet. It's early; sit down and try again," said Canady.

"But I have tried, and everything is against me now."

There was a big lump in Punch's throat as he said this, and Jim was thinking how much better it was for luck to be against anybody else than against oneself.

"Here, sit down and try once more."

Punch listlessly fell into a chair, and accepted the loan offered him. Again he lost, and again, and still once again, until at last, when the old keeper told those present that daylight had come, Punch left with Still; but Jim Canady had every cent of his wages, and due bills that would take every dollar of next month's salary to pay.

"I see you made up with Jim Canady after all."

"Yes, he looked like he was sorry, and then he had just lost all the money he had as we came in."

"The devil you say! That man never loses all the money he has. Well, you are the softest puddin'-head I ever did see. Why, that man owns two or three houses."

"He does?"

"How much did you lose?"

"Not much."

"Yes you did, you lost all you had."

"How you know?"

Still paid no attention to this question, but asked: "How much in due bills has he got against you?" "I didn't say he had any," replied Punch evasively.

"But he has got some. How much?"

"The best I can recollect, it's about forty dollars."

"Whew," whistled Still as he stared mutely at the young man for a moment, then said: "I hardly believe it. A green-horn like you attemptin' to win from Jim Canady! But you have learned your lesson, and I hope you will profit by it."

"But I did win at first," said Punch, still loth to admit that he was the inferior player of the two.

"Of course you did, you simpleton. Don't you know that he did all of that for his own purpose? He knew that if you were allowed to win for awhile you would fall easily into the trap he had set. And you, like a blind mule fallin' in a ditch, got caught. I told you before hand that he was tricky, and now that he has got your due bills, he will be paid, if it takes every rag off of your back."

"Look here, Still Lawson, I know I have not done like you told me, but let me tell you right now, I'm old enough to attend to my business. It was my money that I lost, and not yours. I worked for it, and I'm goin' to get more where that came from. I'm goin' to pay that black-hearted villain every cent I owe him. I am tired and sick of your tellin' me what to do and what not to do, just like a child,

and what I've got to say is just this, and that's all: You tend to your business, and I'll tend to mine."

The loss of so much money was enough to depress the young man, much less the taunts of his friend, which, coming at so untimely a period goaded him to such a state of recklessness that he forgot himself, for he might have considered his words had he thought long enough.

"I will attend to mine, and you and yours can go to the devil in the future," coolly replied Still as he started off along the dimly-lighted streets.

Punch stood still, thinking. As he thought of his past folly, of his recklessness of the past few months, and his neglect of his little Jude, to whom he had not written since his return, and that had been more than six months ago, he felt horribly ashamed of himself, and felt that it would be a great relief if he were dead. The cooling breeze of the morning refreshed him somewhat, and reminded him of home, and how sweet was the reminiscence of the time when he was happy.

There is a period in every life, however embittered, however stricken in poverty, sickness, or sorrow, that is always recalled as the criterion of our earthly happiness, and the mind constantly recurs to it whenever we are miserable. However happy we may become, however rich, however free we may be from pain, we are not utterly content, and in our thoughtful moods we often recall the delicious enjoyment of a single meal, of a night's rest, or some delivery from trouble that might have been forgotten had not the mind persisted in retaining it to feed upon and delight in, even during the harassing cares of a lifetime.

When Punch slowly and moodily took his way homeward the sun was rising, and as he entered the house his landlady looked askance at him, and simply nodded, without saying anything, when he said "Good mornin'."

As if ashamed to be seen, he hurried to his room, and undressing went to bed. For a time he could not sleep, but eventually his eyes closed, and he dreamed of that which harrassed him the more, for he rehearsed the events of the past forty-eight hours until he awakened suddenly and found that night had come again. Dressing and going down stairs, he slunk away in the friendly darkness like a guilty thing, and got his supper at a restaurant where he was known.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PUNCH MAKES A DISCOVERY.

During the month following the final separation of Still and Punch, the latter young man had of necessity to request an advance upon his salary before the whole was due, which somewhat aroused the suspicion of the company's manager; but he said nothing further than to observe to the young spendthrift:

"You run through you money mighty fast. You had better lay up somethin' for a rainy day. If you got sick, what would you do, eh?"

"Get well or die, one."

"Most likely die, if you haven't got a plenty of friends like these," said the manager as he handed several notes to Punch.

"That's so," admitted Punch as he thanked him and went about his work.

Having been tempted into learning the fascinating games of poker and crap, he became an habitual player, and his gains were sufficient to pay his expenses; but when his monthly pay was due it was not forthcoming as usual, which caused him to wonder if the manager could have forgotten it. He waited a few days until he was quite sure, then he asked for the balance of his money.

"Why, didn't you know that Mr. Canady had stopped the money belonging to you, by law, because you owed him some forty odd dollars."

"I—I didn't know he was in such a hurry for his money. He said 'any time' would do."

"'Any time' with a man you owe money to is always the most inconvenient time."

"I didn't owe you enough to pay the whole amount, but he said he would take all I could spare him on account. I didn't ask you about it, but I supposed it all right. I think you were out at the time."

"Yes, sir; but I'll know who to trust next time, as sure as you are born. The hound, he must have thought I was goin' to beat him out of his money. That's all right this time; but please, sir, don't pay anything else for me, even if my wages are garnisheed. I don't believe this watch is worth twenty dollars, much less forty, and that's what I agreed to give for it." Here Punch nervously drew forth his watch and showed it to his employer, remarkink as he did so: "See what you think it is worth."

"I ain't much judge of watches, but if you agreed to pay Canady forty dollars for that you haven't got any business with money. And he is as good a swindler as he is a gambler, if what I hear about him is true. He is a gambler, isn't he?"

"That's what I hear folks say."

"Well, when you see smoke, there is fire somewhere. Keep your eyes open and don't be fooled any more."

"That's just what I am goin' to do, sir."

Punch returned to his work with a burden lifted off his mind, and while he was far from being happy he was momentarily relieved.

If prevarication was ever justifiable, it might have been so in this instance, and while Punch had abundant reason for further deception, he thought himself fortunate to be enabled to so completely deceive his employer without resort to still more strategic efforts and a more flagrant violation of truth. During the coming month he knew that money must be had, so he won it at play, and fleeced young fledglings who had dared too much, just as he had been done in the beginning. All

those who played with him and lost felt that instead of losing to one whom they hated, they had somewhat of an interest in Punch, and were not altogether sorry that he won their money, that would have been lost to some greedy dog, who might have taken their money and spurned them with a kick afterward. Punch was always ready to treat the young sports who played with him, and consequently won friends among them.

Late one night, after several hours of play, he left the gaming house somewhat the worse for having played. He was hot, nervous, restless, and irritable. He had already been drinking, and before going to bed he took a night cap at a neighboring bar, and was walking slowly up Broad Street. The clock on the City Hall tower looked down like a flaming eye, and showed the hour to be two in the morning. Punch drew forth his watch for comparison, corrected it, and was replacing it in his pocket, when upon looking up he saw the veiled figure of a woman crossing the street toward the Capitol Square. There seemed something familiar about the gait of this woman, but the distance and the obscurity made him uncertain.

He would follow her at a convenient distance and see whither she went. He was quite certain she had not seen him, and if she had, she would hardly know him.

She walked rapidly, and because of this she was not disturbed by the officers on duty, although they eyed her suspiciously, and she, fearing that she might be stopped, hurried all the more when she passed one.

Punch kept her within sight, and quickened his pace to match hers. She went up Capitol, thence up Grace Street. Seeing that she was followed, she endeavored to elude her pursuer by turning back upon her course. Punch took advantage of a tree, and when she again took the same direction he ceased following her.

He then took an independent course, and walked very rapidly, because he was quite sure by this time who the woman was, still he wanted to make no mistake.

When he again turned into Grace Street and looked in the direction from whence she would come, he saw her figure faintly outlined. She was walking more leisurely now, since she was not followed.

Punch hid himself behind a big tree in the deepest shadow, and waited. She came nearer, and now she paused at the corner, and looked about, probably to see if anybody was watching her. Seeing no one, she tripped softly to the side gate, gently opened it, and a moment afterwards there was a faint creak of door hinges as she let herself into the house by using a key, which she had not forgotten to take with her.

The reader has already guessed that the house was Mrs. Donnan's, and the woman Julia.

"There now, if that don't beat the devil and Tom Walker!" said Punch to himself, as he saw the figure of Julia disappear through the side gate. "What in the name of sense was she doin' down there so late?" he questioned himself half-aloud as he sauntered away, his thoughts, already jealously afame because of the omnipresent fear that a rival might be supplanting him, tantalizing him to such a degree that the real or supposed rival would no doubt have been badly punished for his folly had he appeared in a corporeal state.

It was indeed Julia whom Punch had followed. Having left her room clandestinely early in the night, she had gone down to Florence Banks's, where she could more satisfactorily entertain her company, especially upon this occasion, for it was no other than Still Lawson whom she expected. He had seen her home several times, but had never been invited in. This he was not able to understand until, upon asking her, he had been told curtly "that

Mrs. Donnan didn't like her havin' young men comin' about the house," which he accepted as the truth; but to condemn at heart the author of, and to signify his contempt for in words, that would be out of place here.

Such, however, was far from being the whole truth, for while it was true that Mrs. Donnan restricted Julia to some degree, Julia had long since come to see the laxity of her discipline, and to little care for a breach thereof. The principle reason for not bringing Still in to see her here was because she was too proud, and preferred to meet him at Florence Banks's to having him come into the general kitchen.

At first Still was entirely different from the men whom Julia had known before. At times he was as taciturn, gloomy, and forbidding a companion as one could imagine, while at others he was as companionable, talkative, and as pleasant as could be desired. Try hard as ever she might to entrap him into loving her, she failed, and failed miserably. That wonderfully wicked little look of hers, the merry ripple of a laugh, and the smile that had already done sad work for easy victims like Punch and his ilk, had no effect upon him. But now she found serious work indeed, for Still was cunning, and so far master of the art of deception himself that he readily saw through the flimsy creations of her artful brain even before their evolution, and for his amusement he frequently permitted her to think himself entrapped for the express purpose of seeing her disappointed.

That he did not now, nor could ever love her, he was quite sure; that is, his passion for her was that of Eros, and not that unquenchable love of a pure heart, but with that he was consumed. Every movement of the beautiful woman excited within him those animal passions which some writers have denominated unholly, but after all are purely physiological. Every twinkle of her dazzling eyes, every

dimple in her soft cheek, every dewy zephyr from her half-opened lips seemed to say to him: "Take me! Oh, take me, I am yours, yours, forever and forever!"

Oftimes the torture that this young man underwent, during the period that he was trying the qualities of this woman, was quite as difficult for him to bear as his seeming indifference was to her.

Many times had she positively assured herself that she would never, never see him again, when, lo! the first time she met him her resolutions melted like ice, and she straightway went over the same process again.

Punch, on the contrary, was her devoted slave. With the faithfulness of a dog to his master, he would go the most extravagant length to please the girl, only to be sharply upbraided, and be denied her society after he had served her so devotedly. Again and again had he been treated in this shameful manner, which he bore with calm resignation, apparently desiring naught else than to have his gifts and service accepted, and to kiss the hand that flung him aside. Others before him had learned better, and he perhaps would do so. The infatuation of a young man just assuming the dignity of manhood, for a woman is something surpassing human belief or reason; especially if that woman happens to be the elder of the two.

This, unluckily, was the condition of these two young people when they met, with the resulting sequence. It was not long before Julia began to slight Punch, which the latter did not pretend to notice; but continued the headlong pursuit of his hopes and desires, until he was upon the verge of ruin. The first rebuff that he had received was not very long after the famous ball. Punch, for a time, was a favorite. She went to balls, suppers, church, and the theater, always accompanied by him, until it began to be whispered about that at

last Julia had sobered down and would soon be married.

However, she had her pride, sensitive as it was, touched by a remark overheard while in a crowd, that stung her sorely and made her grind her teeth in rage at the insolence of the meddler who could not keep her tongue to herself. "I don't see what she finds in that ugly black boy—he ain't nothin' but a boy—to love. Looks like she might look higher, than think of marryin' him." The look of the speaker, as she said the words, caused Julia to believe that she was speaking of her, and since her innate pride caused her often to do things she knew to be wrong, she obeyed its promptings more speedily than she did those of her better nature. There and then she resolved to fling to the winds every debt of honor and gratitude, and even respect, for the generous fellow's feelings, and cease thereafter to have more to do with him. It suddenly became apparent to her that Punch was not all that one of her comeliness might expect in a lover, much less in a husband. Husbands! Bah! Husband, babies, quarrels, and hard work—no, not yet, she would wait. But as for Punch, he must go. But how? She had certainly had no cause for a rupture with him, because he was as lavish with his money as his purse would afford, in fact he had gone considerably into debt to satisfy some passing fancy of hers.

He had not mentioned to her that he had followed her that night, but after seeing her indiscretion upon this occasion, he had resolved to ascertain if it was true that she went regularly to Florence Banks's, and if so, for what purpose. He had hesitated to mention the fact to Julia hitherto, for fear of arousing her indignation. Repeatedly he had kept watch upon the streets along which he had seen her go, and repeatedly had he seen her swiftly-moving figure passing at about the same hour. At last his curiosity had been aroused to such a pitch that he

made up his mind to let her know that he was aware of these solitary nocturnal walks, and to ask for an explanation of them. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for him, he said, on their way to Julia's home, just after she had overheard the remark that prompted her to quick resolution:

"I saw you the other night, but you didn't see me."

Julia looked indolently at him, and replied carelessly:

"You did?"

"Yes, but you can't guess where I saw you."

"No, I won't try. Where?"

"Down on Twelfth Street, comin' up this way."

"No you didn't. It must have been somebody else, for I haven't been down there lately."

"Why, go way from here, Julia," laughed Punch derisively, that sent the resentful blood mantling to Julia's face.

"You must think I'm blind if I don't know your walk, even if I didn't know your dress, which I did. You pulled your shawl closely over your face, but when you went into the house I knew it was you."

Julia was almost happy when this excuse for a quarrel was forced upon her.

"What!" she exclaimed, as she hastily withdrew her arm from his own, and stepped apart, better to give effect to the bitter words she was to utter. "You lie, you cowardly eaves-dropper, spy; you scoundrel, you! You pretend to go with me because you love me, you impudent rascal. I lower myself to keep company with such as you. As you, do you hear? when I might marry whoever I chose. You villain! What if I did go there at night, you haven't got a thing to do with it. Yes, I went to Florence Banks's, and I go home any time I please."

"I—I, but—but I didn't follow you because I was afraid to trust you. I did so because I loved you, Julia. I have never dared to tell you so before, but

now that you have forced from me the reason for my waitin' to see you home in safety, after I accidentally saw you the first time, I do tell you now. I don't know your reason for goin' down there so often, and I don't care, so you don't stop me from watchin' you home. Julia, I love you. Often I have told you so in my letters, and you never said a word about them, about the love I have for you. I never sleep that I don't dream about you, Julia. My days are spent in thinkin' of how to make you happy, and I feel like I owned the world when I make myself believe that you love me; but oh, Julia! when I feel that you do not love me, when I know that other and better men have asked and even begged you to marry them, I feel that I don't want to live. It is for you that I would do anything, bear anything, if I only had your love."

Her hesitation made him bold, and with the assurance that women admire, if they do repel, he was encouraged to then and there take the handsome woman in his arms and kiss her fervently. The dim obscurity of the spot was propitious for love-making, and the lateness of the hour made the street almost deserted, and the city was becoming quiet, so that the falls of the river might be heard. No sound save the whirr of an occasional electric car, or the general hum of the city, that momentarily grew less, attracted one's attention. Punch was oblivious to all. He cared nothing for the beautiful night, its soothing and elevating influence, nor for its sleepy sounds, that soothed one to slumber like a droning bee. He cared for little else in life but Julia. He had his heart fixed upon winning her, and he had determined upon its accomplishment, despite the fact that one thing was absolutely essential, and that was Julia's consent. Julia, for one brief moment, permitted the caresses of Punch, much to his surprise after the hot words of a moment before. Then she coolly withdrew from him, saying:

"If I didn't feel very sorry for you, Mr. Brooks,

I would have called for help when you kissed me. After what I have said to you, I must say that you are the most persistent and provokin' man I ever did see. I don't doubt but that you love me, or that you think you do; but for very good reasons on my part, I think it best that we cease to even know each other, and I am very sure that the passin' passion that you have for me now will, when you grow older, prove even to you to be such."

"But, Julia, won't you promise to try to love me? Don't throw me off like a dog, and tell me never to see you again. I was told when I first met you that you were cruel, heartless, and ambitious, carin' only for your own self, and the satisfyin' of your own whims, but I didn't believe it was so. But—"

"You find that it is," said Julia, finishing the sentence for him, and continuing: "Well, what if it is. Haven't I got a right to be what I please, and if it suits me best to be cruel to those I don't love, or that I hate rather, who has anything to do with it? Then, my innocent young man, you will learn presently that however hard you may try to love anybody, it is impossible, just as much so, as it is for me to love you. No, we can't try to love one, it comes without an effort."

"Yes, but often when a man is frequently in a woman's company, sometimes the woman learns to love him."

"Yes, but I never would call that love. Then you forget that constant association has a tendency to kindle neglect and maybe hatred. At any rate, I do not love you, and as for marryin', I don't want to think of it." And she gave her pretty shoulders a shrug.

By this time they had reached Julia's home. As she was about to disappear through the gate, Punch caught her by the hand, and with a voice almost broken by his tumultuous feelings, said:

"Julia, good-by, and may God bless you; whatever has been your reason for this treatment I don't

know, I hope it's a good one. I still love you with all the passion of my youth. I adore you. But I may never see you again. If hereafter you are sick, in sorrow, or in need of friendly aid, I am your lover still, Julia." Then he was gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PROVERBIAL COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

During the whole course of Punch's career of mad infatuation for Julia, Jude had remained unswerving in her devotion to him, and while she had replied to letters of his, which came at rare intervals, she did not write oftener than he, for several reasons; one of them being her utter dislike for composition, for it usually meant a whole day's work to indite a letter, including the time consumed in preparation thereof, and jubilation after the letter was actually completed, sealed and directed.

She was proud, too, but rather that self-respecting pride than the fictitious variety, and this also prevented her from writing oftener. In the few letters that she did write, she chided him for not writing more frequently, and he would assure her, in reply to them a month afterward, that he had been busy, and she, innocent child that she was, believed him.

One morning, about a year after Punch's visit home, she was out at the cowpen milking, and was in the act of dragging a young calf away from its mother, where she had let it go so that the cow would let her milk down. Upon hearing a rustling of leaves in the fence corner she looked up, and who should there be, of all others, but the handsome Still Lawson. With a glad cry of surprise she put the pail of milk down, which the calf promptly turned over by giving it an effectual hunch, believing this necessary to better enjoy his morning draught.

Still mistook the sparkle of gladness and look of

joy in every lineament of her face to be emotion at sight of him, but he was mistaken. It was because he was Punch's friend that she greeted him so warmly.

"I sho' is glad ter see yo' Mis' Still. I 'clar' ter Gawd yo' li'l' mo' skeered me ter de'th when I looked up an' seen yo'."

"I didn't know I looked so scary as all that."

""Tain' dat, it's 'ka'se yo' crep' up so e'sy, lek er cat."

"Oh, that's it."

"How yo' lef' all at home, Mis' Still?"

"All are well where I live, Jude, I thank you; but you know I haven't got a real home. It is some-thin' I want very much, but nobody will have me, and I can't keep house by myself, you know."

He was getting upon dangerous ground now, thought Jude, and she adroitly evaded a reply to what he meant to be a question by innocently asking, in the most disinterested manner possible, but she was in a tremble of excitement the moment the question escaped her:

"Hi, Mis' Lawson, yo' ain' by yo'se'f, is yo'?"

He looked her straight in the eyes as if endeavoring to search the innermost recesses of her mind for her most hidden secrets, before replying. Her eyes were lowered before the bold gaze of the passionate man before her, and several seconds had elapsed before he answered carelessly:

"No."

Her heart gave a great bound of happy expectation, as she heard the lazily drawled out "No," but was immediately cast down again when he added:

"No, I'm not by myself. A young man named Robinson came with me for a few days' hunt."

She turned her head away, and her bitter disappointment so overcame her that she feared to trust her voice. It was suddenly found to be entirely trustworthy, however, when she found the sad

work perpetrated by the calf, which had not only overturned the milk from the other cow, but made his mother's come down, and had imbibed a greater portion of it as well.

"Name er grashus! Dat ca'f will be de e'en er me yit. He de mos' aggervatin' li'l' vill'an I uver see!"

"Here, let me help you." Still was over the fence at a bound, had caught the recalcitrant calf, and had him away from his mother in a jiffy.

Jude, to quiet her tumultuous feelings, set to milking again at a rapid rate. Still stood looking at her a moment, then said:

"I thought you said you were glad to see me just now, Jude, and here I have been standin' fully five minutes and you haven't said a word. What are you thinkin' about so much, my little girl?"

"Yo' nummin' whut I thinkin' 'bout, 'tain 'bout yo'," and she turned her head away to avoid his seeing the tears in the corners of her soft eyes.

"I know what you want to hear about most, and that is—that is—" teasingly drawled Still.

"G'way, man, yo' wuss'n er ca'f! 'Dat is,' whut?" asked she.

Still laughed at the thought of the simile, and said:

"Punch."

"I ain' said nuttin' 'bout who I wan' ter heah 'bout."

There was no denying the change that came over the countenance of the milk-maid, but she waited for Still to say more. Seeing his dallying manner, she said with the frankness of those unsullied by society:

"Hi, man, whyn't yo' go on an' say whut yo' gwine say an' be dun wid hit. Yo' ain' gwine skeer nobody."

"Why, what do you want to know?"

"I wan' fin' out ef you'se crazy, dats whut. I

thought yo' wus gwine say sumin'. Now jes' let him in"—meaning the calf.

"I am afraid I can't tell you that which you would most like to know."

"Den whyn't yo' say so at fus'."

"That is, I know that you want to hear about that young rascal Punch, as you call him. (Again the sparkle in Jude's eyes.) But you know he has come to be such a fast young blood that he quarreled with me inonths ago, and I have seen him very seldom since. I know this much, however, and that is he is leading a wild life down there, and he is cuttin' a wide swath with the young sports."

Jude did not quite comprehend all of Still's colloquial speech, but quite enough to alarm her for Punch's safety, and she begged to know more.

"It will do you no good to hear how he has thrown himself away."

"Whut? How th'ow hese'f erway? I don' un'erstan'."

"You don't understand when I tell you that Punch has become one of the worst reprobates that I know? He gambles with every cent that he can lay his hands on, drinks whiskey like a fish, and at present he is run entirely mad about Julia White, a handsome young woman who is leadin' him a wild race and makin' him spend money right and left."

Still was to some extent departing from the truth just here, for Julia had sometime since relinquished Punch, and was instead enamoured of Still to that degree that she sought every opportunity to be with him.

The effect upon Jude was all that one possessing a black soul like his could have desired, and he saw with satanic glee that he had sufficiently poisoned the simple mind of this child of Nature, to make her believe almost anything bad of the former friend of his.

Jude stood silent a moment, as if unable to articu-

late, but presently found her voice sufficiently to say between sobs:

"Ef dat had been enybody else but yo' I would er said dey lied, but yo' look lek yo' tellin' de truf." And her soft eyes looked appealingly into Still's, as if hoping to find an evidence of doubt in them; but unswervingly he looked straight into her face, saying:

"What I tell you is so, and if you don't believe me you can go and see."

"Yass, I know dat too, but I sho' dus think harder yo' fer tellin' me. I thought all dis time Punch wus doin' whut he say he wus gwine do, an' heah yo' cum tellin' me he runnin' arter sumbody else. Whyn't yo' stay 'way fum heah, man? I wus jes' es happy es I could be twel yo' cum roun' tellin' 'bout whut yo' see an' heah. Ef I thought dat Punch loved me, dat wus 'nuff ter mek me happy, an' now yo' dun cum an' sp'iled all dat."

Here Jude covered her face with her hands, and leaned on the fence, and was silent. Still paused a long time before speaking, then said:

"Then you blame me for tellin' you how Punch has treated you, how he has led you to believe that he loved you ali these years. Now he has thrown you over for a handsome and better-educated woman, and has treated you with such neglect that no other but a woman of your patience, devotion, and love would stand. Yet you are on the verge of a quarrel with me for doin' you what to me appears a friendly service."

Jude held up her head suddenly upon hearing this speech. There were no sobs in her voice now. Her eyes flashed and sparkled like jewels, and there was a tremor of passion in her voice as she spoke in reply. It was not grief, nor any other emotion than anger. Her pride had been touched, and her feelings had received such a shock as only comes once perhaps in a lifetime. Suddenly she gave vent to such a display of anger that Still confessed after-

wards "that the little hussy certainly had a temper."

She first removed the ring from her finger, that Punch had given her years before, and in doing so her finger was lacerated in the act, but she heeded this no more than a pin prick; then she flung the ring down on the ground with spiteful force, saying:

"Now, nex' time yo' see dat li'l' black nigger folks call Punch up heah, tell him whut I dun dun, will yo'? Jes' let him know ef I ain' good lookin' 'nuff fer him, er ain' got 'nuff sense, dat I ain' got no biz'ness wyarin' his ring. Tell him I say I ain' walkin' roun' beggin' nobody ter have me, ef I is black. I thought all 'long 'twus sumin' dat wus keepin' him fum writin'. Now I know de kin' er biz'ness dat wus. Tell him I dun foun' him out, Mis' Lawson, de ve'y nex' time yo' see him."

Still stooped, picked up the ring, and handed it to Jude. She refused it, saying:

"Hi, man, whut yo' reck'n I wan' fling hit 'way fer? I don' wan' hit."

"May I wear it, then?"

"I don' keer whut yo' do wid hit. Th'ow hit down de well or squ'sh hit wid er rock ef yo' wan' ter."

Still did neither, but placed it upon his finger, where it remained until one of the most eventful epochs of Punch's career occurred.

Jude declared she must go, and Still held out his hand in the most insinuating manner that he could command, to say farewell.

"I surely am sorry, Jude, that what I have told you has been painful for you to bear. And I trust that you don't think harshly of me for warning you in time."

He seemed so frank and plain spoken with her, that the girl could not be other than friendly with him. Yet she could never bring herself to a thorough liking of his insinuating manner, that with her was of course indescribable, but resembled that of a serpent.

"Yass, I know dat, Mis' Still; but yo' don' know, seh, how hard 'tis ter give up enybody yo' bin livin' day an' night fer I don' know how long. But ef he thinks Jude ain' got sense 'nuff, an' is black es er pot, he mus' be right in not wantin' her."

"Jude, you know that I think too much of you to even harm a hair of your head, and I want to save you from anybody else that is likely to do so. If I have helped to do this by comin' over here this mornin' I am more than satisfied. Now, goodby; I am goin' back to town this evenin', and I just thought I would come by and say howdye."

Jude said farewell in a mechanical sort of way, and went into the house, where she had to give some explanation of the shortage of milk to Mrs. Morton, who was by no means pleased at seeing so little. Jude readily found cause to heap the blame upon the unhappy calf, which sufficiently satisfied her mistress.

How distressed and distraught of mind was the unhappy Jude as she first experienced the unfaithfulness of man. And since he, whom she had set above all others as the embodiment of fidelity, had proved false to her, whom could she trust? She certainly did not know. That night, upon going to her room, she got out the precious packet of letters that she had received from him, and, seating herself on the floor by the fire, read them over in the flickering light, now and then dwelling longer than usual over a tender passage, as if bidding it a long farewell, then with a sigh watching it burn to ashes before beginning another, possibly holding her face in her hands meanwhile, and if we could have observed closer, a trickling tear might have been seen now and then coursing down either cheek.

A day or two later, after the spoliation of several sheets of paper, and wasting a great deal of time, the following letter was posted at Giff Gaff by a messenger. Now, since nothing is hid from the

prying eyes of the fiction writer, we find it to read as follows:

"Cloverdale Va
"dec 11. 18—

"Mister jeems Brooks

"dear Jim.

"I sete myself, an tak my pin in han to write yough a few lines. This leves me well an' when it reeches yough I hope it will fine yough the saim.

"I say that I wus well, but I aint. I hase er grefe er my min that makes me sick, an its heap wussner, (i don know how to speil it) sicknes er yough body. I hear say that yough done forgot your Jude, and that yough been learnin' a heap er meanest, and rascality down thar. Your little Jude is mighty sorry, but ef it makes yough eny more happy ter fergit her its all rite, she knows shes blac' dout folks 'mindin her on it, and she knows she ain got no edicatir, yough know what I mean. I can't spell good.

"Good bye forever fur this is last letter yough will git from your ole sweetheart.

"JUDE WILLUMS."

This was addressed to Mr. J. Brooks, to a street number that Still Lawson had given her, which was of course not correct, for indeed it was that of Still himself. He did this for the express purpose of intercepting any letters that she might write. This was done with promptitude, and immediately upon the arrival of the letter in Richmond a few days later he indited an answer to Jude, so closely imitating the writing of Punch, which he was an adept at doing, that the unsuspecting girl took it to be genuine, and as she read his familiar writing, as she supposed, she could scarce refrain from holding her breath as she read the unjust and harsh words concerning her. When she had finished her ears tingled and her cheeks burned with indignation. How the city had changed the former kind and good-natured

youth to a hardened, selfish man, she thought. The letter was brief and incisive, as follows:

“Richmond, Va.
“Dec. 15, 18—.

“Miss Judith Williams,
“Cloverdale, Va.

“Miss Williams:

“I have just received a letter from you, in which you appear to be laboring under the impression that you are treated badly. Yet instead of first making known to me, the cause for complaint, that you claim, you foolishly listen to what others say to your own ruin.

“Since you mention it, one of the chief reasons that I have not written to you more regularly is, that your letters are so very poorly written, and the spelling so bad, that I actually am ashamed for the postman to bring them to me. I know, too, that possessing no more education than you do, you could never expect to appear in society here in Richmond, as my wife, with becoming credit to me.

“I am, yours very truly

“JAMES BROOKS.”

This had the desired effect upon Jude intended by that mischief-maker Still Lawson; and it so far pained and angered the good little woman that she did her best to destroy every evidence of her knowledge of Punch. His ring was long since cast away, and his letters had been burned, but his photograph, and other trinkets that he had given her, were in her room. These she gathered with scrupulous care, and burned. She could not help remembering, however, the rapture with which she kissed the photograph when it was received. How noble and handsome, she had thought, he looked!

All that happy young dream was over now, and to her was left nothing but remembrances that she could not forget, nor would if she could. It was

delightful to think of the happy days they had spent together, and of the joy she experienced the night before he went away, and how she furthered his ends by lending him money. All these happy memories made the present events seem harsh and unreal.

Jude was a philosophical young woman, and when she found that Punch had ceased to care for her as she had abundant reason to believe, she ceased to worry about the matter in a few days; and in a week or two her former buoyant and happy nature asserted itself, and her griefs were soon apparently forgotten.

There is no accounting for the vagaries of the mischief-making little fellow who takes infinite delight in piercing innocent people's hearts with darts, that evidently never fail of hitting their marks, even though the marksman is reputed blind. One of his unusual tricks was the instigation of Still's passion for Jude. Where was the good-looking fellow's taste? some would say. The idea of such a thing—a handsome, elegant, city-bred fellow like that falling in love with a country wench! Absurd! And she not even possessing the quality of being light skinned. Whether Still held other than a passing fancy for Jude, we, prophets though we may be, are totally unable to say. We exceedingly doubt such to be other than the case, nor, do we believe if our minds were spoken in the matter, that his love was at all honorable.

Events, however, will prove whether it be otherwise. Still, while on his way to Richmond, had thought upon the course he would pursue. Already the poison he had strewed in the heart of the confiding and innocent girl was making itself manifest and it was with somewhat of a jubilant air that on the way home he held up his hand for Robinson to see the ring.

"Well, I'll be darned, Lawson, if you haven't got the scent of a hound, for calico. Where did you get

that ring? Here we came up here to hunt, and instead of birds, you take home a gold ring. Come, tell me where you got it."

"Humph, you don't think I was fool enough to come away out here for a few birds, if that was all, do you? If you do, you are mistaken. I am on the track of other game, my boy. If you could have seen the splendid little girl who gave me this ring, you would have forgotten what you came out here for, too."

"Let me see the ring."

Still removed the trophy from his finger, and proudly passed it for inspection.

"Go 'way, Still Lawson, what you tryin' to give me? You brought that ring from Richmond, and then try to make believe you got it from a country gal."

"I hope I may die right in this spot if I didn't get it from the sweetest and slyest little woman this very mornin'."

"Well, sir, all I've got to say is, the women don't value trinkets much up this way, to give 'em away to strangers like that."

"Who told you I was a stranger up here?"

"Why, nobody; but I thought you were."

Still laughed, and said:

"I forgot to say I met this girl more than a year ago, and she made such an impression upon me that I could not forget her, and so I trumped up an excuse to go huntin' that I might see her. This inornin', however, she was in such a humor, because of some disagreeable news that I thought it my duty to tell her, that I thought it best to be content with the ring for awhile, and to rest my suit without pressin' further. So I came away, you can be assured, much against my will."

"Well, I wondered why you were in such a hurry to go back to Richmond when you had just come away. I say, confound the women-folks when they

interfere with a fellow's fun. What is this little witch's name that you are so crazy about?"

"You never mind about names," replied Still; "I can't tell you yet. As soon as I get all my triggers set, I will let you into the secret."

With this, the conversation between the two ceased until Richmond was reached.

Still had sufficient discretion not to force upon Jude, at the moment of making known Punch's perfidy, his own devotion for her, or we had best say passion. And beyond displaying the feigned sorrow of the hypocrite that he was, he thought it best to wait, and wait he did, for a more opportune time. In the meanwhile he would seek further evidence, that would everlastingly overthrow any rule that Punch still held in the heart of Jude.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN WOMAN STOOPS TO FOLLY.

The clandestine visits of Julia to Florence Banks for the purpose of meeting Still Lawson could have but the expected result, and that was to enkindle, afterwards to inflame, in the heart of the passionate and handsome young woman such an intolerable love for the young man that it became noticeable to a marked extent even in Julia. Never yet had she permitted him to call at her home at Mrs. Donnan's, but always chose to meet him at Florence's. Daily, almost, she would write to him, and communicate by telephone, with long-drawn out conversations that told too plainly of her infatuation. Still never committed any message to tell-tale paper, and he usually let her do most of the talking, both in the presence of others and over the telephone.

Still was also sufficiently wary not to blunder headlong into pitfalls that had entrapped many victims before him; but he met every feint that the wily young woman made, with the mastery of a fencer. She had at last met her equal, and was ready to yield to him the supremacy the moment he asked; but he did not ask her love, and declare, in inflammatory language, that he would be her slave for life. Knowing well the power he held over the woman, he permitted her to wear every method of fascination threadbare with the same indolent, devil-may-care air that he might have done had she been sixty years of age. She saw with jealously-flashing eyes the pleasant manner which

he spoke to other young women, and remembered long the sharply spoken words and curt speech often used to her. This, of course, she would have resented had she dared, but she did not for fear of arousing him. Still, seeing his advantage, pressed it as cowardly natures will when certain they have nobody accountable to for the consequences.

They had just returned to Florence's, one night, after going to the theater. Florence had gone out, and nobody remained at home but the decrepit mother of the latter, who grumbled somewhat when she arose to open the door for Julia and her escort. Scarcely noticing the old woman, who stood blinking like a bat, and chewing with all her might, interjecting the process now and then with a dissatisfied grunt, the handsome young creature asked:

"Where's Florence?"

"How'd debble I know whar' Florence is. I reckon yo' know mo' 'bout her dan I dus."

"We'll wait till she comes. Come in." This to Still.

They walked into the sitting-room, the old woman passing to her little closet of a room, where she promptly became oblivious of the two young people. Julia indolently flung herself into a rocking chair before the fire, while Still remained standing, looking down upon the entrancing woman with the greatest apparent unconcern in the world, although every fibril of his passionate body was thrilled to the uttermost, and he felt, when she began removing her wraps, that his will would at last succumb.

He watched with the critical eyes of a connoisseur, and the taste of an epicure, as she removed her hat, displaying those rich raven braids that had the sinuous beauty and glossiness of a snake. Her soft, bedimpled hands threw from her shoulders the opera cloak of downy lamb's wool, displaying in all of their beautiful symmetry the splendid shoulders, round and soft, and rich in the dusky hue of a ripe olive, tapering upward to the rounded and plump

little throat, that was perpetually heightened in beauty by the graceful curves it assumed with every movement. While the downward, swelling lines of her bosom were lost to the view of Still beneath the folds of satin that constituted her dress, just as they reached the acme of perfection.

Her foot was thrust saucily from beneath innumerable folds of soft stuff and placed jauntily on the fender, where its owner appeared to forget it had been placed, while she was speaking. Still admired with unfeigned delight the graceful contour of her ankle, until, finding something had detracted his attention from what she was saying, she punished him by ensconcing the offending member within its proper domain.

She had been chattering the whole time since her arrival, while he had said no more than obliged to, and then in monosyllables. At last, exasperated, she determined once and for all to ascertain the cause of his taciturnity. So she began the investigation by saying:

“I’ll declare, Mr. Lawson, if you don’t beat any man I ever did see! What have you got against me, that whatever I do to please you it seems to make you dislike me, and treat me with the coldness of a stranger? What have I done? Tell me that.”

“Why, you haven’t done anything that I know of, except break the hearts and pockets of several young men of my acquaintance, and of one I know in particular.”

“Oh, I know who you mean, that young scamp, Jim Brooks?”

Still smiled derisively, knowing only too well that his remark would lead on the flippant girl, which it did.

She began such a tirade against the former friend of his that he was surprised at her vehemence, and said, as she paused for breath:

“Why, what changed you so? I thought you were his best friend?”

"Yes, I know this young man has befriended me, and has had my company in the bargain ; but he has come to do certain things that made me so hate him that I hope never to see him again."

"I hadn't heard it. What did he do?"

"Do a plenty. But never mind, I'll never bother about it, since it is all over, and I am none the worse for the insult."

"Insult? The hell you say! Julia, did that little upstart of a country dog insult you? Say, Julia, did he? Tell me, woman, and I'll kill him, though I go to the end of the world to do it! Don't you hear?"

The suddenness of effect upon Still was unlooked for by Julia, but her eyes danced with pride as she noticed how quickly he was ready to resent any injury done her, and she had done unwittingly what she had been trying months to do unsuccessfully, and that was, to attain some proof of his devotion. Now that she had found out, she would further try him, so she said in reply to his impatient questions :

"Don't be so quick. I might have been mistaken when I said insulted me ; for, from what he said to me afterwards, I truly believe he meant only to prevent me comin' to any harm. And then the time when I told him we had better part, I surely was sorry for him, and half-repent of what I had done a few minutes before. Had it not been for thinkin' that somebody else loved me more than he, I am afraid we never should have separated. Then, sometimes I feel like the man that I love is so cold, distant, and unlike any lover that I ever saw, that I am half sorry I gave him up."

"I don't know which to believe. You first talk against the young man, and then look as if you felt sorry for him. Now look here, Julia, I'm no boy, nor a fool to be trifled with. I love you. I loved you the moment I saw you, and this very minute I feel on fire with a passion that is destroyin' me. By

heavens, if I thought you loved anybody but me, I would feel like killin' 'em!"

Joy was to be seen in every lineament of Julia's handsome face as she arose with suddenness from her seat by the fire and threw her arms about the neck of Still, exclaiming:

"I knew it, I knew it! You have been mighty hard with me, boy, but I loved you. How I do love you, my wild cat! You want to scratch somebody's eyes out because they look at your Julia. Well, you shall, because I am nobody's but yours. Yours, do you hear, my hero?" And she gave one of those gay little laughs that even made the cynic Still proud.

He drew her closer and closer to him, until her head fell languidly upon his bosom, and her rich black eyes were brimming with happy tears, and, looking through half-opened lids languishingly up into his. Her lips half-opened appealingly for one of those kisses in which souls seem to be transported. Her breath came in short gasps as if she was frightened, and her breath fired the passion of Still to such a degree that he kissed her so roughly that the girl almost believed him to be the human prototype of the animal to which she had likened him.

"Why, Still, what is the matter?" she asked after awhile, as her head was released, all tumbled.

"I'm takin' advantage of the opportunity I have neglected so long," he laughingly said.

"Then whose fault was it," she saucily laughed, "but yours?"

"Yours."

"No such a thing."

There was a gentle dispute, ending in a repetition of the foregoing scene, much to the annoyance of the old woman, whom they disturbed.

"Name er Gawd, Julia, whut yo'all mekin' all dat racket in dar fer?"

They guiltily did not respond to this question, but

lapsed into quietness soon after. Florence, returning presently, was curious at first, upon seeing Julia so radiant, and was surprised when that young woman seized her immediately upon entering, and pirouetted about the room, without once caring for the consequences.

"Hi, Julia, have you gone crazy?"

"Almost," confessed Julia.

"I believe you're tellin' the truth for once in your life."

Still had sufficient command of himself to again return to the cold, stolid look which Florence was accustomed to seeing him assume on certain occasions. He remained a short time after Florence's return, then politely excused himself, and left. Julia followed him to the door, where she remained inordinately long. When she did return, Florence began teasing her about Still, and asked most impertinent questions concerning what had happened during her absence, to which Julia replied:

"Why, you want to know too much. If I answer all the questions you ask me, you'll know just as much as I do. But I'll tell you this much, he's caught this time," said she, as she nodded in the direction in which Still had gone.

"There, now, I thought 'twas somethin' to pay, the reason you were so frisky to-night. Caught? I know he's caught, but I'm afraid you've caught somebody you'll be glad to let go before you are a year older. You have caught many a victim before to-night, you saucy scamp, but you are the one that's caught this time. Now you listen to what I say."

"Shucks, you don't know what you are talkin' about, Florence. I caught?" And she laughed one of those defiantly discordant laughs, then added: "The idea; why I never saw the man yet that I couldn't twist around my finger, and Still will be like the rest, only a little harder maybe; but you watch, and in a few months he will be a slave to me.

I know it has taken me longer to bring him to a confession of his love for me, but I think all the more of him for it. As for a dotin', audacious rascal, that thought I was his, soul and body, Jim Brooks beats all I ever saw."

"Yes, but you see if you ain't sorry you flung him up for Still. Looks like to me, Julia, that that young man is made for somethin', and I believe yet he is the best of the two, if he is the darkest." Florence put it as delicately as possible, for fear of offending the acute sensibilities of Julia.

"Never mind about you, he suits me, and I am the one to be pleased."

Florence could only admit that what she said was true.

"Now there's one more thing I want to ask, and that is, when are you all goin' to get married?"

"Married? Well, er—we haven't decided about that yet. In fact, I was so happy I forgot all about askin' Still about it. Shucks! I'm not botherin' my head about gettin' married so soon. It's plenty of time to think about that. I'm young yet, and when I marry I'll get old so fast, and, and—well, never mind, I want to have a good time a while longer. When a woman marries the man thinks he owns her, and she ain't allowed to have nothin' without her husband says so. He can go when he pleases, and do what he pleases, and asks nobody any odds. Just wait 'till I get ready to be laid on the shelf, then I'll think about marryin'."

"I hear you talkin'," said Florence, with the faintest show of belief in what Julia was saying.

Again Julia took the solitary walk home, and was followed at a respectful distance by her devoted slave, the indomitable Punch, who was too late in reaching the accustomed rendezvous of Still and Julia, and consequently was still ignorant of the business she could have at that late hour so far from home.

Still, on the way home, began thinking of how

he had been tricked into declaring his passion for Julia, and he felt somewhat chagrined when it recurred to him. His plan had been to continue the siege, however long it might last, until Julia gave in and declared her passion for him, which he was certain she would eventually do, however unmaidenly it might seem, for he saw too plainly her devotion to him. He so far lost his head as to become angered at a pretended insult, and now was more in the power of this young siren than he would like to confess himself. Still he so far controlled himself as not to declare his intention of marriage, so he had not committed himself.

Marriage, at present, was out of the question with this fickle young man, and he declared to himself, as he pensively walked along, "And more, I'm not ready yet." With the shrewdness characteristic of him, he took great care that no promise was made to the young woman in the presence of witnesses. Not a line of his writing was in her possession, and he was careful to appear in company with her at rare intervals, totally out of all proportion to their intimate relations. When he brought her presents, which was seldom, he brought perishable fruits, or candies, so that nothing remained a few hours later to warrant the rumor that he was more than an admiring acquaintance. He knew well the fickleness of this young woman, and in the short time that he had known her she had so basely treated several that he knew, that he had determined in the beginning to so teach her that in future she would be less likely to continue her heartless work.

Accordingly, with the masterfulness of a genius of evil, he set about encompassing her in such a web of cruel trickery that the poor girl, in spite of her many faults, is deserving of our sympathy. He held such an influence over the girl that she did, almost against her will, things she knew to be at variance with her sense of right. But she loved him, adored him, with the passion of the idolatrous

being she had become, and was willing to deliver up without question the most precious of her possessions to him without a word of denial or complaint. With the insidiousness of some slow and fatal malady, his influence had insinuated itself into her mind, and she had become his. If ever fiend incarnate had reason to rejoice, that particular one was Still Lawson. After months of assault he had won the prize for which others had vainly striven, and had brought this proud woman to understand that he was master; all of which she appeared no more to mind than had Still's intentions been honorable. Poor, conceited fool! Perhaps she believed him honest, or maybe, in her precipitate folly, cared naught what his intentions were, so that he loved her.

Rejoicing in the consciousness that he was enamoured of her, she felt the full glory of a conquest and the sweet recompense of a victor. Forgetting the bitterness that sometimes follows upon the sweetness of the honeycomb, until, presently, bereft of all that honor holds dear, she would go down, down to the abysmal depths of perdition and human degradation, to be stranded on those bleak shores where her bones might whiten and serve as guiding posts to the more virtuous and less confident.

Still continued his visits to Julia, or rather his appointments with her, until one night Florence asked, as Julia entered:

"Well, Julia, you and Mr. Lawson are a mighty long time understandin' one another. If he's goin' to marry you, whyn't he go on and do it?"

"Never mind about that; he's all right."

But her haste to avoid a subject which ought to have been uppermost in her mind was sufficient to surprise Florence, if nothing more, for she knew that girls usually talk of little else, when such an eventful period is looked for.

"You may think so, Julia; but let me tell you,

woman, that man is goin' to fool you. You had better keep a sharp eye on him. I ain't never heard of him doin' anything that was mean and low-lifeted, but I can tell by that man's eyes that he's just waiting' for a chance, and when he hits he's goin' to hit hard."

"You talk foolish, Florence. Just as though Still had some reason for makin' me miserable. You just let him try to deceive me, and then he'll see what I can do."

In this speech, however, there was wanting that boastful air and confident tone that we would have formerly recognized. For indeed, despite her words of confident assurance, she had her misgivings, but she was far too proud to admit such to be the case.

The first opportunity that presented itself, Julia told Still of Florence's opinion. With a curse Still had replied:

"Yes, I know she can talk all she pleases; but what is she? Ask her what she has been, and see what she says. I never could understand why you wanted to go there so much. It's no use for Florence Banks to preach to you, or to anybody else; she had better keep her mouth shut. As for me, I never expect to go there again; and you, Julia, if you think anything of me, you had better stay away, too."

"Humph, just because you think hard of Florence, because of what she said to me in secret, is no reason why I should stop goin' to see her. She hasn't done me any harm," said Julia, the sometime self-will asserting itself in spite of her effort to curb it.

"You say you love me, Julia, and say that. Don't you see that what she says reflects upon you. As for myself, I don't care a button what Florence thinks of me. She can think all she pleases, and it won't harm me a bit. But, Julia, I am mighty jealous, and I feel like she might influence you so

that your love would become less and less, and then you would hate me."

"No, no. I could never hate you, Still, and you know Florence and I are old friends. She would wonder why I stopped comin' to see her. And she would be sorry and think maybe you stopped me from goin', and she would hate you."

"What the devil do I care how much she hates? Oh, well, you can go if you want to, but I never expect to again." This he spoke sharply, and as his lips came together at the close of the sentence they appeared to be sufficiently hardened to perform the office of teeth.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WILD OATS ARE HARVESTED.

Punch, after being told by Julia that it was useless to continue his attentions longer, was so utterly desolate that he wished himself dead and forgotten a thousand times. Scarcely able to fix his mind upon work, he and his employer had several misunderstandings, and several times he came very near losing his position. At night, his mind burdened with thoughts of this woman, he was restless, and often sought to walk off the fit of despondency that almost overcame, and tempted him to self-destruction. Perhaps it was habit, maybe some motive prompted him; at any rate, the faithful fellow would watch as usual the passing of Julia, behind some friendly tree, and would escort her home without her knowledge. In this he appeared to find so much pleasure that even inclement weather was no restraint to his faithful attendance.

Until curiosity prompted him to ascertain the cause of Julia's frequent nocturnal visits to Florence, the young man had appeased his aroused jealousies by trying to deceive himself into believing her intimacy with Florence to be the cause of them.

Casually passing the home of Florence one night, he thought he recognized the gait of a man who was approaching him. He crossed to the opposite side of the street, and walked slowly. As the man passed within the light, he recognized Still Lawson.

"Wonder where in the world he's goin'," he thought, as he watched him walk quickly away, and

Punch was becoming reassured, when to his utmost dismay, and amid a thousand conflicting emotions, he saw him pause at Florence's door and knock, and in a moment was admitted. Could it be true, then, that Julia loved his former friend, and had been comin' here secretly to meet him?

Despite the despicableness of such an act, he would wait until he came out, for in his present state he cared little for appearances, and not much for self-respect, now that the object of his desire and love was become a possession of Still Lawson. He waited and waited. The wind soughed mournfully through the bare trees, and sang a requiem of her dead love for him, he might have thought had his mind been poetical, but since it was not, he made up in curses against Still, the perfidy of women, and the weather, whatever he lacked in poesy.

The night was frosty, and as he paced back and forth, with the regularity of a sentinel, he grew more and more impatient, and hotter and hotter grew the imprecations, until by the utterance of these alone one might have thought he could have kept warm. When his vocabulary of invective was thoroughly exhausted, and his patience well nigh spent, he saw Still come out and start off.

"Now," said he, "we'll see what's what."

He stamped on the hard pavement to warm his feet, he got up closer to the house, and, thinking himself too close, started to go farther away, all the while muttering against the dalliance of women, when the door opened and Julia stepped lightly out on the pavement and started off with that tripping gait of hers. Punch recognized her even in the shadow, and as he, in astonished silence, saw her walk away he did not this time follow. Despair, disappointment, chagrin, and the thought that he had played the arrant fool for this woman to practice her wiles upon made him almost forget that she was a woman in the first storm of fury that

aroused him almost to the point of doing her an injury.

As he started toward his boarding-house, he felt indeed that life was unendurable. He began thinking, as he walked along, of his wild career during the past year; of the money that he had idly wasted; of his useless life, and of little Jude away up home. As his thoughts recurred to her, perhaps for the first times in weeks, he was conscience-stricken; for he well knew how shamefully she had been treated. Fearful lest long thoughts upon his misfortunes would add to his miserable state, he sought that solace that comes of drinking, of drinking deeply; accordingly, to gain that, he drank. Upon entering a saloon he saw Still sitting at a table, with Young Robinson, drinking beer and eating sandwiches. Still looked straight at him, but said no word. Robinson returned his salute. Punch turned to the bar and ordered a straight.

"Here, give me a glass. I don't want that thimbleful," said he as he filliped the glass with his finger, and it fell crashing to the floor.

The act angered the bartender, but he did not show it; instead, with suave coolness, he placed a tumbler by the whiskey bottle, which Punch filled and drank at a draught. Jingling a dollar on the counter, with the air of a confirmed roué, he was given the change, and without a word he left. Before reaching the house where he boarded he visited other drinking places, and when he arrived there he was so drunk that he found his room with difficulty.

Still remarked to Robinson, as Punch left:

"There's a boy I feel sorry for. But prosperity and he couldn't get along well together, and before long he will find himself ruined for life."

"Why, how came it that you and he had a mis-understandin'? You all used to be mighty close friends."

"Yes, but he thought he could paddle his own

canoe, and I thought I would let him have his way. He's goin' to the dogs fast enough now, and if he keeps up he'll lose his job in less than a week. That boy started as well as any young man I ever did see, considerin' his chances, and he was goin' right along up until he got to gamblin' and runnin' with Julia White."

Still apparently forgot that Punch owed him whatever knowledge he possessed in the way of fast living, as many of us do. We are easy to forget the influence we exert upon others, if in reality we are ever cognizant of it.

"Well, I see you learn little by the experience of your friend, who looks like he is desperate since Julia got tired of him. She will do the same with you, too, Still. She's a devil, that woman is?"

"Don't you worry about me, Robinson. I know women too well. And I know Julia better than she knows herself. She's in earnest with me. I know that, and she would get on her knees to me if I told her. She is positively afraid of me, and I can make her do almost anything I want to. Notice how she changes whenever I am where is she the next time you see us together."

"But I don't understand. What have you done to the girl?"

"I don't know. Nothin' other than to do exactly opposite to what other men have done."

"I let, or rather I require, her to pay attentions to me. I'm not crazy about her, handsome as she is (that is, I appear so). If I go out with her anywhere I hardly notice her. This piqued the spirited beauty at first, but I've got such a firm hold upon her, Robinson, that she bears the woundin' of her pride in her endeavor to please me. It almost makes me laugh, sometimes, to see how much she tries to please me, and then to see how I hardly notice her efforts, until she is mad enough with me to declare she doesn't love me. But she does; and I know it. Everything she does to please me brings

me delight, but I'm not so foolish as to let her know. If you would like to know the secret of bindin' a woman to you that loves you, be strong enough to appear to forget her; let her feel the sharp claws of your disapproval. Don't bother yourself about satisfyin' every whim, or you will find yourself spurned and dictated to. Curb your enthusiasm in praise of her efforts to please you. In fact, give no attention to her complaints, but surprise her with some act of yours that will please her when it is least expected, and you will make a woman adore you, that loves you a jot, at the same time you won't forfeit your command and mastery over her. By George! she'll respect you, and will put you above herself every time. That's the way I've done with Julia. I've beaten her at playin' the thing she has tried upon others. While it has been hard to do so frequently, I have refused to relent, with the consequent result that Julia respects and loves me, and hates every one of the prattlin' fools who have courted her time and again.

"That's not all. Julia, handsome as she is, and as much as one of her good looks might expect, does not excite in me the love that I bear that simple little country girl I told you about on the train. I know Julia to be the one best calculated to arouse any man's passion, and I fear with me that it is this, for I haven't the respect nor sanctity for Julia that I have for this little country woman, though Julia be far handsomer."

"Ah, well, Still, I always knew you to be crazy about women; now you are more so than ever. Just keep on, and you'll find your match yet. See if you don't."

To return to Punch.

The next morning, after a disturbed, drunken sleep, that lasted until almost noon, he arose, and made his way to the office. On his way he stopped to get a bracer or two, so that when he reached the office he was pretty well inebriated.

He went to his desk, and tried very hard to do so without disclosing the fact that he had been drinking. Immediately he saw an envelope lying on the desk addressed to himself, he knew what to expect. With hands nervously trembling, he hastily opened the envelope and read his discharge, to date immediately, it read. The young man's face, at first, was pitiable; and with a great effort he kept back the tears that would well up into his eyes as he thought upon his disgrace.

With almost a sob he asked the manager:
What does this mean?"

"It means just what it says. Can't you read? Do you think I'm goin' to hire you, and pay good money for you to loaf about, get drunk, and raise the devil every night? I've been hearing bad things about you lately, Jim, and since you were seen drunk last night so that you could hardly find your way home, I think we had better part company. Here's your money," and the manager handed him a sealed envelope. "Now, let me tell you, young man," ventured the manager, "the road you are on, will lead to final disgrace, far worse, than my dischargin' you. So take your money, use it to board and clothe yourself until you get other work to do, and for God's sake stop gamblin'."

"I have given you my work in exchange for this money; we are square. As for the advice you give me, you can go to the devil with it. I'm a man, and am able to take care of myself. If you like to believe others before you do me, I haven't got anything to say, except that you had rather believe a lie than the truth." With these words Punch closed the office door with a bang, and walked off down the street.

Punch scarcely paused to think, but continued his headlong course, abetted by several boon companions whom he found lounging about drinking places. He spent money freely, which was the thing most desired by those who followed him. Wherever he

went he was atten'ded by two or more of these faithful satellites, who immediately ceased their diurnal duty just as soon as money was not forthcoming for drinks and suppers. Punch was able to add to his constantly decreasing store of money by play at old Joshua Tucker's, and so long as he possessed a cent he would not try to find work. Apparently he had lost all sense of shame, and continuing his downward course, he resorted to almost every device to obtain money, always excepting thieving. This was probably owing to the fact that his father had inculcated in him such lessons while a boy that this one trait left was the result of such teaching.

He played policy in the lowest dives of the city, and thereby forfeited the acquaintance of his more respectable friends. He was reckless, caring for nothing, nor how soon he could end his existence naturally, or in aid of nature; but he shuddered to think of self-destruction.

In a few weeks from the time of his discharge he little resembled the careless youth he had been. His face was roseate in its duskiness, which indicated long and continued drinking. His person was unkempt, his linen disgracefully dirty, and though it was January, he wore no overcoat, and his shoes were in holes.

His watch, clothing, everything belonging to him, in fact, had been pawned or sold, and the proceeds invested in magical numbers at the nearest policy shop, piecemeal, until he was literally stripped of everything except a shabby suit, the coat of which he kept tightly buttoned to disguise the fact that he wore no shirt, and his pistol, which he had thought it wise to buy after the affair at the ball. In consideration of the fact that he was constantly in need of such, when we recollect the company he kept, he had therefore refrained from disposing of it.

Latterly, however, hunger made him appear in a pawn shop on lower Main Street, and ask, as he

pulled the weapon out of his pocket and laid it on the glittering glass show case:

“How much will you give me on this?”

The proprietor came forward briskly, took up the pistol, eyed it well, and briefly said in reply:

“One dollar.”

“Give it to me, then.”

“What name?”

“John Brown.”

“Where do you live?”

“In the county.”

“What county?”

“Henrico County.”

“Um, ugh.” The pawnbroker wrote out a ticket and gave it to him, saying: “When you come to redeem your pledge, don’t forget your ticket. This your name on the handle?”

“No, sir; that’s the man’s name I got it from.”

“Oh, all right.”

On the handle was cut deeply, with a sharp knife, the full name of James Brooks.

“If you don’t redeem your gun in two months, I’ll sell it,” added the pawnbroker.

“The warmth of the shop felt grateful to the young man, and he stood a few moments looking at the contents of a case without replying, forgetful that the shopkeeper was waiting to serve him further.

“Anything else, my man?” he finally asked.

“No, sir; that’s all.”

Then he reluctantly returned to go again into the cold streets. He quickly sought old Joshua Tucker’s gaming-rooms as soon as night came on, where for a while, at least, he luxuriated in the delightful warmth and comfort of the rooms. He began playing. His luck was in the ascendant, and he soon won enough to keep him for a month, but with the childish improvidence of his race he said, as he arose from the table:

“Come on, boys. I’ve stripped you clean, I know,

but I've still got a heart. Let's have supper." There was an echo of applause from the group of young men near him at this generous offer. Old Josh spoke sharply at this outbreak of unwarranted freedom.

"Shet up yo' racket dar! Don' yo' know yo'all gwine fetch ev'y ple'sman in Richmon' heah, wid all dat fuss."

They hurried from the room, accompanied by Punch, and once upon the street the party entered the nearest restaurant. For the first time in a week Punch sat down to a respectable meal. Hitherto he had subsisted upon the free lunches at the saloons, but now he indeed had a supper to delight in. Forgetful of his squalid surroundings, and of the grimy waiter, who in a dirty apron served the luscious oysters in dishes of questionable reputation, Punch was too hungry to observe this; and certain strong waters that were brought forth soon blunted their sensibilities to the ultimate degree of not caring in the least one way or the other.

When the company dissolved, but a few cents were left of the winnings of Punch. Every single one of his companions was in such a hilarious state that Punch had the good sense remaining to quit them. In the half-famished state that he had existed for a week, the absorptive powers of his stomach had been sharpened to that degree that in an incredibly short time he was very, very drunk.

It was late, and the leaden sky began pelting down a blinding mist of snow flakes, and it was very cold, and the wind whistled in mournful cadence through the wires overhead, and hurried around corners with a shriek of fury, as if some phantom prey had escaped it.

Punch, chilled through and through, shook as if palsied as the chilling blasts filtered through his thin clothing. His teeth chattered, and he altogether presented a most forlorn appearance, and he was too intoxicated to comprehend the conse-

quences of remaining out of doors a night like that.

Probably it was Nature's effort to prevent him from freezing, or the direction of a wise Providence, that directed him to enter a dirty hallway, leading to rooms over a store on Eighteenth Street. Here he lost consciousness, in a comatose sleep, that must have lasted until early morning.

"Whut in name er Lawd is dis!" exclaimed Charity Brown, stumbling against the prone figure of Punch as she started to go out upon the street. It was very early in the morning, and the hallway was yet dark, still she could see the outlines of the figure on the floor, and she could hear his breathing. Waddling up the steps as quickly as she could, she lighted a lamp, and came down again, by this time scarcely able to breathe from excitement, and the work of transporting two and more hundred pounds of adipose up the steps and down again. She stooped down by the figure of a young man and tried to recognize him, but he was a stranger. She had never seen him before.

"Wake up, man! Wake, up, dis ain' no baid. Yo'll ketch yo' de'th heah."

With all her efforts she couldn't arouse him. Becoming afraid that he might die before she could get aid, she aroused her neighbors, and Punch was soon taken from the cold hallway to Charity's own room, which, while possessing few comforts, was at least warm. Charity, without a word against the procedure, allowed the insensible stranger to be placed on her bed. All kinds of home remedies were given to restore the young man to consciousness, but they failed.

"I gwine sen' fer de doctor," said Charity presently.

The doctor came, gave a multitude of directions, which Charity got wofully mixed, and said, as he examined him, "The young man has been chilled and will probably have pneumonia." When the doctor turned to go, Charity slipped a dollar into his hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A VILLAIN'S REWARD.

After poisoning the mind of the innocent Jude by inditing the letter to her in the name of James Brooks, Still Lawson had occasion several times thereafter to visit her. Every time that he came he would volunteer some excuse for doing so, which Jude believed with confidence. He also insinuated himself into her graces by giving her trifles, and presently he began to assume the part of a lover. Jude, however, was too much a stranger to the art of coquetry to befooled this young buck, and he pretty soon saw that his bewildering descriptions of town life, of its ease, of the high prices paid to himself and to others for doing the smallest amount of work, interested her very much. This had the desired effect of arousing curiosity on the part of Jude to live such a life, so that little effort on the part of Still was requisite to make Jude thoroughly discontented with what Still termed a monotonous country life. This she did not quite understand, but she had no cause for disbelieving him, and her reverence for his superior education and air of confidence made her long for some change from the truly irksome round of farm life.

An opportunity to effect a change soon presented itself. Still, on his latest visit, had told her of an opening that she might secure if she would come quickly, after he had returned to Richmond, to find whether the lady he spoke of had secured a girl. He was diabolically clever enough to preface this information concerning a position that might be had

by a reiteration of what he had already told her concerning the advantages of city life. She became enthused with the idea, and wanted to go in immediate search of the position. Still dissuaded her, however, and advised her to wait.

"Don't be in such a hurry, little girl. I expect you will soon get tired, and will want to come back here again."

"Waal, ef I dus, whut gwine hinder me? I ain't feyerd er nuttin'," was the frank reply.

"I don't believe you are," confessed Still.

When he left he told her that when she got a letter from him to make preparations to come.

With a smile of delight she promised that she would, and then he said:

"Well, Jude, I have been comin' up here for nothin' else but to see you. Now that I have got your promise to come, in case this lady wants you, I may never come here any more. But you will come to me, Jude, and then you'll learn how to live. Now, good-by."

As he ceased speaking he kissed the girl fervently, and to tell the truth Jude did not make the modest resistance that is so tantalizing and so becoming in women.

She would scarce confess to more than a liking for this young man, but she was beginning to love him, or at least so it appeared. Hardly a week elapsed before the promised letter came from Still, and in this letter he said:

"I have seen the lady I spoke to you of, and she told me she would be very glad if you would come, as her maid left her sometime ago, and she has tried repeatedly to secure another. Let me know when you can come, and if I can't meet you, I will get the lady you are to live with to do so. Her name is Mrs. Ophelia Derricotte, and she lives at—. Well, it's no use to write you the street and number, because you will be met at the station. I'm mighty

anxious to see you, Jude. Hurry up and get ready to come."

On second thought Still considered it best not to give the street address of one of the most notorious procuresses that any city has been infested with. He was quite sure that even her evil reputation had not penetrated quite so far as the home of Jude, and in his surmise he was correct.

Jude had listened to the enticing offers of Still, and when her mind was made up it was no use whatever in trying to persuade her to stay. She had told Mrs. Morton of her intentions, and while this kind woman was reluctant to see her depart, she said:

"Jude, you have been with me a long time and I almost feel like you belong to me, but of course if you can do better by going away I certainly can't object, however much I dislike to see you do so. I hope you will like Richmond, but if you get tired and want to come back to your old place, why come, and I will be glad of it."

Little Nelly, who had now grown to be an awkward girl of ten years or more, when she found Jude was going to leave, would not be comforted until time had somewhat softened the sharpness of her grief. She implored her to stay, but the childish prayers were of no avail, and Jude promptly began packing for her journey. How important she felt as she made preparations to go away, and her heart gave great bounds of pride as she replied to inquiring neighbors, who in the same formulated manner, with scarcely a variation, asked:

"I heah folks say yo' gwine erway, Jude. Whar yo' gwine?"

The questioners knew just as well as Jude where she was going, but apparently had unusual satisfaction in securing the information direct. A cheap trunk was brought all the way from Cloverdale, and all of Jude's earthly possessions, except those she wore, were packed away in it carefully. Then she

called upon John to take her to Cloverdale, which he willingly consented to do. The parting from her friends on the farm was indeed a bitter trial, one that she would recollect as long as life itself lasted. Many another would have become disheartened and have given up the journey, but Jude was resolute, and with unusual determination she kept a bright face, and smiled to each as she said good-by. Once upon the road, John, by dint of prolonged thrashing upon the venerable back of Dolly, urged her into a trot, that served to make such a jolting and clatter over the frozen roads that he was glad to desist. However, when he tried to pull up the obstinate creature she appeared to misunderstand him, and went all the faster.

"Name er Gawd, mule; wey! Ain' yo' nuver gwine ly'arn nuttin'? Look lek de older yo' git de bigger fool yo' is." After jolting the frigid specimens of humanity in the wagon to her heart's content, she continued the journey as patiently and as meditatively as any thoughtful mule could have been expected to do.

When the train came, Jude was almost speechless with excitement, and as the powerful iron-horse rolled up in his majestic beauty she could scarce forbear a little scream, and but for John catching her she might have fallen from the platform.

Once on the train she was soon whisked out of sight of the little station, with its low, whitewashed buildings, and flying through woods and over rivers faster than she ever dreamed it was possible to go. She had never before ridden on a train, and the experience was as novel to her as a balloon trip to others, and far more exciting. She presently grew dizzy from ineffectually trying to keep her eyes on the rapidly disappearing objects, and she gave it up.

When the train arrived in the city, and was standing still, she asked if Richmond had been reached, and somebody answered "yes." With a

feeling of absolute loneliness she took up her packages and went out upon the platform.

"There she is," said Still to the notorious Ophelia. "Where?" she asked.

"Comin' down the steps of the second car there, with the box under her arm," he indicated.

"Well, if you haven't got a taste for beauty, I don't know my business," said she sarcastically as she got a view of Still's victim. "You'll be bringin' every black wench in the country to my house if I let you."

"Look here, woman, I won't stand any foolishness. If you are goin' to do what you promised, do it, or quit. I don't ask you to do it for nothin', and it can't matter much to you what color she is so you get the money. Your reputation won't suffer, nor your conscience bother you. Go on. Tell her you were sent by Mrs. Dorricotte; say your name is anything—I don't care what the devil you call yourself. Don't let her know I am here, and take her home with you."

With an air of vast superiority the brazen creature approached the innocent girl as she was bidden, for Jude had stopped short after alighting from the train, at a total loss to know where else she must go. It seemed a long time before Ophelia came to her, and tapping her gently on the shoulder, asked if her name was Williams.

"Yass, dat's my name."

"Jude Williams?" asked she.

"Yass. How yo' know who I is so good?" asked Jude, overjoyed to meet somebody that at least knew her name.

"Well, I'll be _____. What can Still Lawson be thinkin' about to bring this fool woman all the way here for, when she is too ignorant to know the war is over?" thought Ophelia as she eyed the girl, pausing before replying to her.

"That's simple enough. Mrs. Dorricotte told me

you were comin' to-day, and I was sent to meet you. Come on. Have you a trunk?"

"Yass'm."

"Give me the check, then, and I'll have it sent up for you."

"Whut dat?"

"The check, the brass thing the agent gave you."

"I don't know whut yo' talkin' 'bout. Dat's er fac'; lemme see; he did gimme er piece er brass, but I dunno whut I dun wid hit."

"What's that in the corner of your handkerchief?"

"Dar, now, ef dat don' beat all!" she exclaimed as she excitedly undid the knot and gave the worthless piece of brass, as she thought, to Ophelia.

They were soon in a cab, and hurried off to their destination. Arrived at the house, the cab was paid for, and they entered the rather dilapidated house, and Jude was shown to her room, and left for the present by her companion.

Jude had never been in quite so handsomely furnished a room before, and thought some mistake had been made. She was ill at ease, and the first time she saw anybody passing through the hallway, she asked them to get Mrs. Dorricotte to show her where to sleep, and what she wanted her to do, and so forth. The girl she asked wickedly winked to a companion on the stairs, gave Jude a quizzical look, promised to ask Mrs. Dorricotte, and with a ribald song disappeared. The song was of such a sensuous nature that it caused Jude's ears to tingle, but she thought such freedom a part of city life, and soon forgot the song as well as the singer.

She was so long a time hearing from her supposed employer that she sank into the plainest chair in the room, where she soon fell asleep.

When she awoke it was dark, and as she groped her way to the window she saw such a glare of light that she wondered if the city was on fire, or if that was the way the town was lighted. As nobody appeared to be concerned about the matter she con-

cluded that such must be the case. No one had yet come to tell her where to sleep, and besides she was hungry, since she hadn't eaten a thing since early in the morning, so she made bold enough to trip lightly down stairs and inquire concerning these matters.

She knocked at a door opening into a room where she heard voices. Ophelia opened the door herself, and came into the hall, saying:

"I declare, Jude, I forgot about you. Where have you been so long?"

"I jes' bin whar' yo' lef, me, an' I mus' er gone ter sleep, 'ka'se I jes' now waked up."

"Come along and get supper, and go to bed if you want to."

She showed her the remnants of a meal left on the dining-table, bid her help herself, and when through go to bed.

"But I don' know whar' ter go, les'n yo' show me."

"You know the room you just came out of, don't you? Well, stay there to-night."

"Sho' 'nuff!" exclaimed Jude, astonished.

"Yes; now eat your supper," said Ophelia as she slammed the door.

Jude feasted herself, and wondered if people lived so well in town every day. When she had gone to her room and was preparing for rest, she heard a knock at the door, and without thinking said:

"Come in."

The door opened, and a man that she had never seen before entered, and quickly closed it again.

"Hi, man, go outer heah!" she cried. "Yo' mus' ain' got good sense, comin' in heah jes' lek yo' owns de house. Go out, I say! Ef yo' tetch me I'll knock yo' down an' larm de neighbors. Stop! Stop right dar; yo' ain' comin' er step furder!"

"I won't stop!" said Still as he flung aside his disguise and shook hands with her.

How delighted she was to seen him, and ask him questions. The first being:

"Hi, Mis' Lawson, whut yo' doin' wid all dem contrapshuns on?"

"Been to a ball, Jude. So you didn't know me, did you?"

"Nuh, I didn't know yo' fum er side er sol' leather."

"Well, Jude, how do you like your new home? You don't have to work so hard as you did up in the country, do you?"

"I ain't had nuttin' ter do yit. I don't know how I lek 'twel I see who I gwine wu'k fer."

"Why, you won't have to work at all if you do like I want you to. Listen--"

Here Still's face assumed the sinister appearance characteristic of his villainous nature, and he spoke rapidly. He had the assurance to seat himself beside Jude, on the bed, before he mentioned his plans entirely. The innocent girl, like a lamb led to slaughter, was all unconsciously treading upon dangerous ground; but her confidence was still unshaken, and she listened with childish faith, believing that no harm could befall her. With a smile of triumph he began:

"Jude, I have loved you ever since I saw you first, and now that I have got you here in Richmond I mean that you shall love me, or I'll know the reason why!"

The tone of utterance of these words was so different from the usual pleasing speech of Still, that Jude looked up in surprise, and edged away from him, and then changed her seat to a chair, saying as she did so:

"Hi, Mis' Lawson, whut marter'd yo'? I ain't nuver hyeard yo' talk dataway. I cyarn' love eny an' ev'ybody. Den, I ain't cum heah fer no foolishness. I cum heah ter git er place, not ter set an' talk lek dis."

"This is all the work you have to do, Jude. Only love me, and you have little else to do." His tone was now mollified, so that Jude feared him less.

"Humph! G'way, man, yo' dunno whut yo' talkin' 'bout. I know dat ain' gwine satersfy Mis'—Mis' Der—I cyarn' call her name. Den whut I wan' ter know is, huccom' yo' in her house?"

"Pshaw, you little goose! I came to see you, and I am goin' to stay here till you say you love me."

"Ain' I dun tol' yo' I cyarn' love enybody, man. Huccom' yo' keep pesterin' arter me?"

"You think, then, I went to the trouble to bring you from the country to be talked to that way? You must think I'm a fool if you do. I brought you here because I took a fancy to you. Now you are here, and I will see who is master. As for Mrs. Dorrictte, she is the woman who met you to-day. She has got all the servants she wants, and in fact it was one of my tricks that induced you to come to Richmond. The woman Derricotte is one of the grandest villains in this town. She does just what I tell her; and I pay her well enough, I know, plague take her! If I don't want her to hear, she never hears a thing, nor does anybody else. Now don't you think you could love me just a little," and he caught her hand, which, with the rapidity of a cat, she snatched away.

"What!" she exclaimed, her voice husky with anger at the one who had betrayed her into such an infamous place.

"Ain' dat 'ooman gwine ter hire me arter I dun cum way down heah? Yo' mus' be foolin' er me." And she smiled gloomily at him, as if vainly hoping that he was only teasing her.

"No, my young lady, that Mrs. Derricotte has no more intention of hirin' you than I've got of goin' to the moon. I've just told her I made you come to Richmond because I wanted you. I don't ask you to work. You can live here; I'll see that your

board is paid, and give you all the money you want in the bargain."

"An' whut I gwine do fer all dis?"

"Oh, you little fool! Love me, that is all. Listen," and he whispered in her ear.

With a leap like a couchant panther she was across the room at a bound, every fibre of her indignant person throbbing with rage. Had she been white her face would have been pale; as it was, it was ashy. Her nostrils were inflated and her eyes blazed. She apparently ceased to breathe. Then such a torrent of invective as she overwhelmed him with.

"Say dat ergin, yo' 'ceitful scound'el, an' I'll knock yo' brains out! Now ain' yo' dun dun hit. Meked me cum down heah thinkin' I ain' got no sense, an' gwine have yo' way 'bout ev'ything. Stop! Stan' whar' yo' is, or I'll kill yo!"

Still gave a fiendish grin, as if conscious that his prey was only to be tamed by prolonged play. He barred the way to the door, and with libidinous eyes, contemplated his intended victim.

"Stan' way fum dat do', yo' liar! Yo' ain' got me yit."

With another of those supple bounds she had so surprised Still that, taken unawares, he was totally unprepared for her onslaught. In a twinkling she had seized him about the waist, and in spite of his struggles, had thrown him through the window, sash and all going with him. He was no match for this robust country girl, who had never been sick a day in her life, and although small was very strong.

She immediately caught up her things, and went down the stairs bounding, and in her flight overturned the individual of the ribald song, who had been asked by the woman Ophelia to "see what the devil is to pay upstairs!"

Before Still had fully recovered from his undignified and hasty exit, Jude was scurrying away, and was soon lost to view.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHE WHOM THE LORD WILL BLESS.

When Jude found herself upon the streets she ran with headlong speed as long as her strength permitted, her chief desire being to get as far as possible from Still and the villainous beings that she had found shelter with, and to forget how she had been treated. The unfortunate girl had scarcely any money, and no clothing except that which she wore, because her trunk had been left behind.

Where to go, or what to do, puzzled her sorely. The night was very cold, and as she cooled off from her long run she felt cold, and her teeth chattered, probably as much from fright as anything else. The street was almost deserted, for it was late; but now and then the foot-fall of a belated passenger could be heard crunching crisply in the frozen snow. It was indeed a predicament for a raw country girl to be in, and the hardest of hearts would have felt for the friendless girl on such a night. She must have wandered a mile or two, she of course knew not whither, apparently with the shadow of a hope that she might see a kindly face and be taken in. Unluckily, most kindly faces were in bed at that unseemly hour.

When so chilled that she felt she could not bear the bitter blast a moment longer, she was startled by an apparition in a helmet and brass buttons, that shone in the cold bluish glare of the electric light like fiery eyes.

"What are you doin' wanderin' 'roun this time o'night?" asked the officer.

"I don' know, seh. I ain' got no whar' ter stay, an' I sho' is cole."

"Where did you come from?"

"I cum fum de country, seh."

"Come here to get work, and didn't get it, eh?"

"Yas, seh; dat's jes' de way 'tis. I cum fum home wid de promis' er wu'k, an' when I got heah, seh, I foun' out I jes' bin fooled."

"Where did you go to get work? Never mind, don't answer; just come with me to the station-house, and I'll hear your little song where it's warmer. That's what I say 'bout you niggers from the country," he mumbled as he walked along crunching the snow, and making great intervals in his speech by the noise—"you come down here thinkin', I reckon, people don't do anything all day long but wear good clothes, hold their hands, and get their money every Saturday night. But if you do you are mighty mistaken. Instead, you've got to work like the devil, I promise you that."

Happily the station was not far from where Jude found the officer, and they were soon in the warm and comfortable police quarters.

As the half-frozen girl warmed herself by the stove, a sleepy officer came to the wicket and asked:

"What you got this time, Jim?"

"Vagrant, 'bout as near as I can come to summin' up the case. She don't seem to know nothin'. I reckon the woman is about half-frozen, or her brains are addled, one. Anyhow, put it down vagrancy."

Jude was asked to give her name, home, etc. Then the officer in charge of the station took up a bunch of keys and bade Jude follow him. Coming to a row of cells he unlocked a grated door, slowly pushed the heavy door open, and told the girl to enter. It was dark, except for the spare rays of light from the corridor, and Jude stumbled, and would have fallen had she not caught herself, she was so benumbed. Her blunder elicited from the

form on the floor a muttered curse for her carelessness, and then was silent again. The voice she recognized as that of a woman, and she felt somewhat comforted, even in the companionship of such a one. Lying on a couch improvised from a solitary bench, she listened to the drunken snore of the wretch on the floor, and to the drowsy ticking of the office clock. Thinking of her sad plight, of the kind friends whom she had left in the country, and of the vile and contemptible manner in which she had been deceived into coming to the city was quite too much for her sensitive feelings, and she gave vent to excess of feeling, and cried. Sleep presently overcame her, and she slept till broad daylight.

When she awakened, her cell companion was still asleep, and as soundly, to all appearances, as ever. Jude thought her apartment queer, and as she lay thinking, she noticed the absence of chairs and a bed, and the doors were barred heavily. When an attendant came to call them, he unlocked the door, and as he did so Jude first comprehended her disgrace, and with a wail of hopeless despair she sank to the cold, hard floor, as if all strength had deserted her.

"Here, nigger, stop your durn racket, and come out of here," said the gruff-voiced officer as he caught Jude by the wrist and helped her to rise.

"Whut yo' all gwine do ter me now, seh I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd I ain' dun nuttin'. Please, seh, lemme go," and the wretched girl trembled as if she had been chilled through and through.

"Shut up!" curtly ordered her keeper.

Her cell companion bore her incarceration philosophically, and looked curiously, with bleared eyes, at the distressed and frightened young woman, and concluded that she would presently become used to such confinement just as she had done. With little ado the prisoners for the night were

presently ordered to enter a wagon, and were driven to the police court.

Here they halted, and were ushered into a subterranean chamber, possessing all the horrors of a feudal dungeon to Jude, who was constantly wondering what punishment would be inflicted upon her for delivering herself from her persecutors and preserving her honor. She was given little time for thinking, for what with the hurry and jostle, and the constant expectation of some strange surprise, the mind of the confused girl was in a ceaseless turmoil.

Presently the justice mounted the rostrum, and a hush pervaded the court. He turned to the clerk, who in stentorian tones announced the court open, and began to read the names from the docket. The unlucky companion of Jude was the first on the list, and she was brought forward unceremoniously, the accusation against her announced, and with the celerity of the lower courts the justice remanded her to the common jail. The prisoner received the sentence with the most stolid indifference, and was told to stand aside.

Jude's name was next, and as she heard it called so loudly, by a stranger, before such a crowd, she felt as though it would be merciful to die rather than face all those people. Hot tears trickled down her face as, with her head hanging for very shame, she appeared before the justice.

"Here, hold up your head!" said this gentleman to her. "What is she charged with?" he asked.

"Vagrancy, your Honor," was the officer's reply.

"Vagrancy! Here, look at me." The suddenness of the command caused Jude to look up in surprise.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"Fum de country, seh."

"What 'd you come here for, eh?"

"Fer ter git wu'k, seh."

"Why didn't you go to work, then?"

"Ka'se the folks fooled me."

"Where did you go when you first came here?"

"I fus' went ter de house uv er 'ooman by de name er Ophelia Der—Derri—"

"Derricotte?" volunteered the justice.

"Yas, seh; dat's hit," and her eyes brightened.

"Where does she live?"

"I dunno whar' dat is, but I know dat wus de name."

"What did you leave there for?"

"I cyar'n tell yo' dat, seh. I jes' won' treated adzackly right, dat wus all."

"I reckon not," commented the justice.

"When did you leave there?"

"Lars' night, sorter late."

"What were you doing when the officer took you up?"

"I wus freezin', dat wus all, an' Gawd knows hit's de truf."

This reply brought forth a suppressed titter that resounded through the court-room, and even aroused a lurking smile about the mouth of the stern justice. He rapped for order, and resuming again his stern look, said:

"That'll do, you are discharged."

Jude still stood as if not comprehending him, and he added sharply:

"Now go, and see you don't come back here again."

Jude, without stopping to think, hastily fled out of the room, and got lost repeatedly before regaining the open air and God's blessed sunlight. The air was biting cold, and as the thinly-clad girl tripped across the street, opposite the big City Hall, she felt that she was little better off than she was the night before. She had prayed during the night to die, but the boon had been denied her, and she would never destroy herself. She was hungry, for she had not eaten since the night before, and by

one of those strange coincidences she passed the same eating-house that had befriended Punch years before. She paused to look at the good things in the window, and looking up and seeing the sign, much faded from the effect of rain and shine, thought it best to rest and get breakfast, so she went in.

Sally Brown came forward to attend to her wants, and presently had her seated by a good fire, in her back room, and enjoying with the intensity characteristic of her race, the hot breakfast prepared by the kindly woman. During the course of the meal Sally kept up a lively conversation with her customer, doing most of the talking herself, and being so absorbed in what she was saying, that she scarcely heard, or, if she heard, paid little attention to what Jude was saying. The breakfast over, Jude had arisen from the table, paid her bill out of her scant purse, and was warming herself before the fire, when some one came in, and Sally went to wait on her customer.

"Tain' nobody but me, Sally. An' I ain' got nay minit to spar'. I got er sick man down home jes' es low es he kin be. I bin tryin' fer I don' know how long ter git up heah, an' I jes' couldn't lef' him long ernuff ter cum, an' dat's de truf. I ain' even know'd who he wus, twel yistiday, 'ka'se he bin talkin' out er he had over since dar he bin. But yistiday he sorter cum ter he'se'f, an' I ax him whut he name wus, an' he say hit was Jim—Jim Brooks, but he say dey uster call him Punch when he lived on de farm."

Jude's acute ears heard the word Punch, and with little ceremony she rushed into the little shop and seized the kindly woman who nursed her lover about the neck, exclaiming:

"Dus yo' know whar' he is? Dus yo'?"

"Whar' who is, gal? I dunno whut yo' mean."

"I mean Jim Brooks, Punch. Call him enything

yo' please, but lemme see him! He's de only frien' I'se got in dis whole town, an' I mus' see him! Cum on!"

"Hol' on, gal, look lek yo' gwine wil' 'bout sumin', an' I ain' nuver seed yo' befo'."

"Dat ain' nuttin', I know Punch jes' es well es I know my name. I jes' hope ter Gawd hit de same un I know."

"An' whut mout be yo' name?"

"My name jes' Jude—Jude Williams."

"Dat's hit, dat's hit, thank Gawd! Dat's de name he bin er callin' night an' day, ev'y since he bin sick. Cum on, gal, le's go back dar an' maybe de sight er yo' mout do him good."

Jude needed no urging, but with a heart leaping with anticipation, and heavy with gloomy forebodings, she was constantly walking ahead of her companion in her eager desire to behold him whom she had loved from the first, and would continue to love, despite his treatment of her.

They were soon in the room of the sick man, and as he lay there, his eyes partially open, his breath coming in short sighs, his face ash-like in its ghastly paleness, he was muttering some incoherent words. He had a high fever, and had been unable to sleep. Some stupefying drugs the doctor had given him served to make him more delirious, if possible, than ever. When the noise of their entrance aroused him, Punch marked the presence of a stranger, and faintly asked who it was.

For reply, Jude knelt down by the bed, took his hand in both of hers, and gently kissed him.

The soft touch of her lips caused him to open his eyes wide, and he saw Jude—Jude whom he had dreamed of, and had longed for so long. With a great sob that shook his muscular frame, and with a mighty effort, he caught the woman to him, and for a while lay peaceful and content.

When the doctor came, Jude arose, despite the

protestations of Punch, who implored her not to leave him.

"Don't leave me, Jude! These folks just tryin' to kill me. For God's sake don't go away; I'll die and go to hell if you do."

When he recognized the doctor he began again.

"There comes that old fool now. He calls himself a doctor, but he ain' doin' er thing, but killin' me by degrees. Whyn't you all get a doctor here that is a doctor. This man ain't done nuttin' but put a piece a glass in my mouth ever since he been comin' up here. That ain' goin' to do me no good. And that ain' all, he's gone and scalded all the skin off my side with hot water. He must think I'm a hog. Never mind, if I live to get up from here I'm goin' to pay him back."

So he rattled on until he had almost exhausted himself. The doctor had left two prescriptions, and multitudinous directions. When he had gone out in the hall, Jude and Charity followed him, every lineament of their faces betokening their deep anxiety and suspense.

"How is he dis mornin', Doctor?" asked Charity.

"He's a very sick man. If he lasts until Sunday I'll expect a change which may be for the better. He's got a very bad pneumonia. Now follow my directions closely, and what we can do for the boy, we'll do. Get the prescriptions now, and give him a powder to make him sleep."

The two women returned to their vigil, and Jude was the first to mention the medicine.

"Dat's er fac', I leetle mo' fergit 'bout dat." And the good woman sought her store of funds, as if unaware that her purse was entirely empty already. She seemed surprised to find it so, and exclaimed, as tears welled up in her sympathetic eyes: "Dar now, I dun spent de lars' cent I had. Now what we gwine do?"

"Spen' dis," said Jude, handing over a knotted

handkerchief in which all the money she possessed was tied.

The medicine was quickly gotten, and given, and by its agency the sick man had some respite from the brain fatiguing delirium. Jude kept a close watch over him through the rest of the day and the ensuing night, and allowed the faithful Charity to rest. Punch scarcely ever stirred before Jude crept noiselessly to the bedside, and in a softly modulated voice, that is such a boon to a sick body to hear, ministered to his wants. How wearily dragged the heavy hours of the night. She had not thought of eating or sleeping, and she found little inclination to do either.

How fervently she prayed, in her quaint and pathetic dialect, that his life might be spared. She was not quite sure that he loved her, even though the meeting in the morning might have led her to believe so, because she reasoned, "he mout er bin outer he haid." Still she hoped, and in event he loved her no longer she would be infinitely happy to see him well and himself once more.

After a long nap Punch awoke. Jude gave him some milk, smoothed his pillow, and asked him if he wanted anything. He did not pay any attention to her question, but began talking of happenings of long ago. Of the happy days when both were children. He would occasionally break out in a hoarse laugh, that was unearthly in its discordant sound, and would wince and mutter a curse as the effort augmented the pain in his side.

How constantly the brain is lashed into working on and on in these deliriums; until, thoroughly exhausted, the victim dies of exhaustion.

No matter how much Punch desired to sleep, he was totally unable to do so unless dosed with a soporific. Every time he became comfortable and was congratulating himself that he was at last rid of his tormentor, a vista would appear in the distance, and he knew what to expect. This vista

would become a wood fresh with the budding leaves of spring and the music of singing birds. In perpetual dread he would listen for the sound that was so obnoxious to him, and presently, away in the distance, he would hear his everlasting peace destroyer, with that peculiar sound, approaching nearer and nearer. He believed himself a child again, and the mortal dread that he bore the phantom of the woods was indescribable. He would hide behind trees, fall into stump holes, climb trees—all being alike useless to rid himself of this old man who, with a mournful note like that given out by a spinning wheel, pursued him everywhere, until upon the verge of despair he would awaken.

Night after night passed, and the sick man grew weaker, until in due course of events Saturday night came. The doctor had come twice during the day, and when he left he sighed, saying:

“He’ll be dead, or better, by morning.”

Through the long night Jude kept watch with Charity. She was so excited and exhausted that she couldn’t sleep. Toward morning Punch began to sweat, and when the sun rose he was sleeping quietly, while Jude was pouring out thanks to God, on her knees, by the bedside.

CHAPTER XXX.

JULIA BECOMES AWARE OF A CERTAIN FACT.

During the dangerous period of Punch's illness Jude had never thought of informing his father of his precarious condition, so that he was progressing well enough to be sitting up in a chair when Jude said:

"Dar, now, I dun fergit ter sen' eny wu'd ter Unc' John how sick yo' bin, Punch. An' I gwine set down now an' sen' him er few lines." She accordingly got paper and pencil and began a letter to John, beginning with the usual formula, "I sete myse'f to write," etc.; but, rare instance, she had to say that Punch had been "verie lowe," but assumed again her usual hopeful tone by appending news that he was better and would soon be "weel." She added nothing concerning herself.

A week or more later John was handed the letter by Mr. Morton, and when the contents had been thoroughly digested, and duly studied over, it occurred to him that Punch might be in need of money. Being absolutely without money himself, he appealed to his friend with the usual confidence that he would secure it. A long-drawn-out parley was the usual outcome of a request for a loan.

"Mis' Morton, please, ser, lemme have a few cen's ter sen' ter Punch. I jes' hyeard he bin sick, an' mos' daid, an' I ain' knowed er wu'd 'bout hit. An' I ain' got er cen' ef I gwine be hung."

"Yes, that's what you niggers are forever want-

ing. You must think I'm made of money, don't you?"

"Nor, seh, not dat adzackly, but I jes' thought dat yo' wouldn't min' len'in' me jes' a leetle twel I sell my barker."

"Why, Punch ought to be sending you money, and now he is flat of his back he expects you to keep him, when you have told me yourself that he makes more than you do. John, you niggers are the biggest fools in the world, and you haven't got the foresight of children. Here this boy of yours runs away from home, gets work, never sends you any money, and presently falls into bad habits, gets sick, has no money and suffers in consequence. Now who is to blame?"

"Yas, seh; I know Punch ain' treated me adzackly right, Marse Flo'noy, but den—"

"John!" sharply interrupted Flournoy Morton.

"Mis' Morton—I sho did fergit dat time, seh. 'Tain' nuttin', jes' er slippance. But den," continued John, "he's sick now, seh, an' cyarn' he'p he'se'f, an' den, seh,"—there was a sobbing pause,—"he's my boy."

"I know that, but it doesn't keep him from being a worthless scamp. Who is that letter from? Let me see."

He took the letter from the fumbling hands of John, and read it through.

"Yes, from another hussy. I see Jude must have been thrown aside by that yellow fellow that used to come to see her, and she has found Punch out again. Here, send 'em this, and tell both to come on here on the farm until the boy is well."

The tone of banter, which was by no means scornful, that Flournoy Morton had used in this dialogue, softened to fatherly advice as he uttered the latter sentence and gave a ten-dollar note to John, along with the letter.

With a profound and characteristic bow he thanked him.

The money and request to return home was dispatched by registered letter on the first train that could be reached, and in due course was received by the despairing young people in their dirty, stifling quarters in the city.

With tears of gladness running down either cheek, Jude, immediately upon receipt of the letter, and becoming aware of its contents, bounded into the room like a hurricane, exclaiming:

"Jes' look at dis Punch! Now we gwine home sho' 'nuff, ain' we?"

The weak and changed voice of Punch answered, "Yes."

The doctor had long ago ceased coming, so that the very evening after receipt of the money a dollar was expended in hiring a carriage to convey the invalid to the station. Charity accompanied them, and after Jude had bought the cheapest tickets possible, brought every remaining cent and gave it to the former, saying:

"Heah, Aun' Charity, dis is ev'y cen' er money dars lef', an' I wan' yo' ter tek dis twel we kin pay de res', whutuver dat is."

"G'way fum heah, gal; yo' mus' be crazy. I ain' charge dat boy one red cen' fer whut I dun, 'ka'se Gawd knows t'war'n much, an' ain' nay one er yo' et 'nuff since he bin sick ter keep er burd 'live."

"Waal, yo' spent sumin' fer medicin', an' yo' jes' got ter tek dis."

Punch was already in his seat on the car, and just as Jude uttered the last sentence the conductor sang out the welcome "all aboard," and with a cheerful laugh she sprang aboard the already moving train, while Charity stared and waved a good-bye as the train began its long journey.

Julia, during Punch's illness, had not been to see him, nor to offer him aid in any way; which, however, could scarcely have been expected of her considering the relations between the two. Yet, she

knew of his illness through Florence. In fact, she was apparently unconcerned whether he got well or died. After he was well enough to go home, Julia happened to be at Florence's one day, when the latter, upon a close scrutiny of the handsome woman, exclaimed:

"I declare, Julia, I believe you grow better lookin' every day. What have you been doin' to yourself to make your face so rosy and full?"

Julia blushed handsomely as she answered:

"I've been so happy, Florence. Still loves me, my old girl, and don't you think that is enough to make any woman cheerful and happy. I've just learned what livin' meant during the last three or four months. Still is a different man from the others I've seen. He'll be master of everything he has anything to do with, or will leave it. To please him I allow him to think he is my master, to do everything he asks me, for it is good to place trust in a strong man, and Still is strong. He has become my lion, for I want a lion for a lover, Florence, and not a dog that will do what I say."

"Yes, and you're goin' to find out presently that the lion has claws. When did you see him last, Julia?"

"I haven't seen him for a week, and then only a little while. He was tellin' me of a fall he had had on the ice, and I noticed a cut over his eyebrow. 'Yes,' I said, 'why don't you let a doctor fix it for you?' and he replied: 'To hell with the doctors, they want to know too much. They would say that I was drunk, I reckon, whatever I told 'em.' And when I started to say I was sorry for him he told me: 'Now let that matter be; it's nothin' to amount to anything.' But I thought it strange that he wanted to change the subject, but then you know he's mighty funny sometimes, and hard to please, so I didn't say anything more."

"So you don't know where he is now, then?"

"No; why? Unless he is at home."

"I don't think he is in Richmond."

"What makes you think so? He's been away without seein' me for a week, many a time."

"Yes, but my mind tells me that he ain't in Richmond, and that lick on his head wasn't made on the ice, either."

Julia laughed away the gloomy suspicions that Florence's words inspired, yet she inwardly felt that Still was not telling her the truth. She therefore determined to investigate for herself, so she went to Still's boarding-place; but his landlady told her that she had not seen Still for a week. Julia adroitly deceived this woman into believing office business alone prompted the visit of inquiry. With heavy footsteps, indeed, did she pursue her way homeward, where everything seemed to provoke and vex her, until other members of the household declared Julia positively unbearable. Every effort on Julia's part to ascertain the whereabouts of Still was as fruitless as if the earth had swallowed him up. She inquired at the office where he worked; but he had disappeared from there very suddenly, and without explanation, though not without getting all the salary that was due him. For Still had appeared at the office the morning after being thrown out of the window, and had secured an advance upon the salary due him for the month, sufficient to cover the indebtedness to him.

Indefatigable as her efforts were, she could not find him. She did not even possess a line of his writing to prove his utterances of fidelity in case the worst came to the worst. All of his presents to her had long since gone the way of all things perishable; and while she knew that a number of her acquaintances were aware of the understanding existing between them, in case anything happened to blacken her reputation, they were none too friendly to turn against her in her time of need.

These thoughts, and constant meditation on the

existing conditions, caused her to become more and more fretful and taciturn. A month after she had become so querulous that the cook for Mrs. Donnan had occasion to say to this lady:

"I 'clar' fo' Gawd, Mis' Donnan, dis house dun got too li'l' fer Julia an' me 'bofe. She dun got so I cyarn' do nuttin' ter satisfy her, 'ka'se ev'ything I dus she fin' fault wid, an' ef I ain' dun whut she orter dun, she jes' keep sayin' I ain' 'ten'in' ter my biz'ness, an' I dun stan' hit long ernuff. Dat gal, er I one, got ter go, one tur'r. Dat ain' all, she for-ever an' uver findin' fault wid my cookin' an' dat's sumin' I ain' gwine let no nigger do, ef her skin is li'l' whiter'n mine."

The cook looked about her as if she had a state secret to retail, and fearing even the walls would hear, bent close to Mrs. Donnan's ear and whispered it.

The information caused this good lady's eyes to open wide with a start, as she said:

"Go away, I don't believe it. I'll call her to my room this minute and talk to her."

Mrs. Donnan left the cook and repaired to her room, where Julia was straightway summoned to appear. Julia probably scented the storm brewing in the distance, and positively refused to attend when called, something hitherto unknown in the good government of the Donnan household. After waiting impatiently a long while, Mrs. Donnan, upon going in search, found Julia idly, and in a preoccupied manner, looking out of a window in the most unconcerned manner in the world.

"Julia, why didn't you come when I sent for you just now?"

"Just because I didn't want to, that's why," replied Julia sullenly. "Everybody in this house has been lyin' about me, and I know it, and now it's got around to you, Mrs. Donnan, and I don't expect nothin' else but that you're goin' to believe every lie they tell you."

Julia was in a querulous mood and in a humor to find fault with everybody.

"Julia! Julia! What do you mean? Haven't you forgotten yourself? Don't you know me well enough, after all these years, to know that I won't believe a falsehood if there are any means of disproving it. I don't believe anything my cook or others may say without proof, and I had as soon believe your statement as theirs. So if you are willing to tell me the truth about this matter, why I'll believe you. If, however, you attempt to conceal from me your disgraceful and shameful actions by false statements, you leave this house immediately."

"Why, Mrs. Donnan, I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"Come, come, you know very well," and here Mrs. Donnan, in an undertone, told her what the cook's suspicions were.

"It's a lie every word of it. What she know about me, the black mouthed —." Here Julia, in an outburst of wrath, gave utterance to such a vile word that it shocked Mrs. Donnan.

"Stop, Julia! You are in my house, and I'll never, so long as I'm mistress here, endure such vile language in my presence! I am surprised, and ashamed of you! Go to your room, and on your knees ask pardon for such an outburst of temper. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Julia was thoroughly aroused now, and gave free rein to the long-smouldering fire that she had endured, and in such a torrent of abuse as never was heard before or since in that house, she literally made Mrs. Donnan's ears tingle; until the poor woman was obliged to threaten to call some of the male members of the family, from a distant part of the house, to quiet her. This had the desired effect of causing her to lower her voice until Mrs. Donnan could make herself heard, when she said:

"Julia, you have given me sufficient cause this

morning, by your show of ill-temper, disrespect to me, and the use of such disreputable language to make me believe you an unfit person to be in my house. So now, as much as I dislike to do it, I am obliged to tell you that you will have to find another home. Your behavior to me pains and grieves me at the same time; for, Julia, I have tried very hard to train you as one of my own children, and when I think of the manner in which you have behaved I cannot help feeling poorly repaid for my trouble."

Julia made no reply, but turned her back upon Mrs. Donnan and sullenly looked out of the window again.

"When you are ready to start, Julia, come to me and I will settle with you," added Mrs. Donnan, in the most even of voices.

Julia felt her disgrace deeply, and when she departed that very afternoon from the home that had sheltered her since childhood, she could not suppress bitter tears of regret at her mad folly. She was already beginning to feel the shame that would grow deeper and deeper, until she would hardly be conscious of her depravity, just as one is unconscious of intense cold after a time. Now, however, she bitterly felt the ignominy and unluckiness of her unfortunate step.

Not knowing where else to go, Julia bethought the best thing to do would be to remain with Florence until she could find a home. Accordingly, she went thither, and surprised Florence by saying:

"Well, Florence, you see I've got my walkin' papers, and I reckon I'll have to hang out here a little while, if you haven't got any objection."

"Why, Julia, I don't believe a word of it! Yes, I see it in your face now."

The careless air, the forced smile with which Julia made known her predicament to Florence soon disappeared, and now that her hot blood had cooled, and she was with her friend, she cried.

After a while she regained her nonchalant air and related the incident as it occurred several hours before.

Of course Florence was indignant at the manner in which Julia had been treated, and she was willing to resort to almost any means to secure some recourse against such, but she was ignorant of the best manner of proceeding. Julia had purposely concealed the real cause that led up to the rupture, because she was loth to believe it herself; yet every day that passed seemed more forcibly to confirm her suspicions.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WOMAN'S DESPERATION.

One morning early Florence had gone out somewhere, and as the unhappy girl lay there, gloomy and dismal were her thoughts. Over and over had she conceived plans, to be obliged to abandon them as useless in the end.

Out of doors everything appeared to gladden with approach of spring. Sparrows busily chirped in the budding tree before her window, the sun was warm, and the air was filled with the indescribable freshness of a rain that had fallen the night before. All the beauties of Nature were lost upon Julia as she lay there idly thinking. Presently she hastily arose, as if her thoughts had suddenly matured and she desired to act immediately. Going to a table in the room, she sat down and wrote as follows:

“Richmond, Va., Apr. —, 189—.

“Dear Mr. Brooks:

“You once said to me, that if ever I got into trouble, that I must let you know. I am in great trouble now; so come to see me. I know I have treated you badly, but I thought I loved somebody else. Come this very night.

“Your old friend,
“Julia.”

Julia stamped this letter and addressed it to Punch's former address at Charity Brown's, and then dressed and took it to the nearest letter-box, after which she returned and ate a slight meal, then idly waited for the coming of night. Impatiently

she kept looking as long as it was light enough, and listening when it grew too dark to see. Florence noticed her preoccupied manner, but did not mention it.

The same day that Julia dispatched this letter, Punch returned from his home in the country, and on the following morning, when he was handed the letter, he recognized the writing at a glance, and his heart gave a great bound as he hastily tore off the envelope and read her message. Hardly taking time to eat his breakfast, he promptly made his way to Julia's. On his way he did his best to account for the young woman's change of mind, but gave it up as a hopeless task, and presently arrived at the conclusion that women were past finding out.

Punch had remained at home long enough to regain his health, and upon his arrival in Richmond it was completely restored. Remembering, with the most profound gratitude, the kindness of Charity, he had gone directly there upon his arrival, for he felt that she was more a mother to him, than anybody else he knew. Without knocking at the door, he stole in the dirty hallway and up the rickety stairway, which seemed bent upon heralding his arrival by creaking its utmost. Finding the door to her room ajar, he softly entered, and, her back being turned, had clasped her about the neck in one generous hug that well nigh stopped her breath before she was aware of his approach. When she had given mouth to a little scream she turned upon the mischief maker with a playful slap; but when she recognized Punch she caught him to her bosom as if he had been a child again, and her own at that, saying, between the happy sobs at seeing him well again, those comforting pet names that make the greybeard long to be a child once more.

"I jes' said dat wus yo'. An' so yo' dun cum back heah to die on my han's arter all?" said Charity,

her face beaming with satisfaction at seeing the boy again. "Hi, boy, yo' mus' be ha'f pe'ished by dis time er day," said Charity as she hustled around in the preparation of breakfast.

In due time it was dispatched, but while it had been in preparation the note from Julia arrived, and the close-observing eyes of Charity saw the change that came over her visitor immediately upon its arrival.

After Punch had bolted his breakfast and departed she said to herself:

"Humph, dat boy dun mighty strange arter he got dat letter. Look lek he ain' got good sense. I sho' dus wunder who writ dat letter."

Before she had ceased to wonder, Punch had knocked at Florence's door and had been admitted by Julia in person.

"How do you do, Mr. Brooks? I'm so glad to see you. Come in."

"Why, Miss Julia, how well you look. You must be mistaken. You don't seem to have had any trouble."

Julia blushed profusely, but stammered forth:

"Yes, I'm fairly well, but—but I have my troubles, in fact I suppose everybody does. You know I have left my old home."

"Yes, I have just found out, for I went there before comin' here. You know you did not say in your note where you were, and as I knew nothin' of the change that had been made I went to Mrs. Donnan's expectin' to find you. I was told by the girl who met me at the door that she did not know where you were, so I thought I would find you here."

"That was another of my blunders. But you are here, at any rate, and I'm so glad to see you. Do you know, it seems to me more than a year since I saw you, and I have just heard this very mornin' that you had been very sick and had gone back to

the country to live. How sorry I am that I did not know of your illness sooner."

It is scarcely needful to say that Julia was falsifying with a purpose. She had known of Punch's misfortune in losing his position, of his wretched downward course, of his sudden and desperate illness, and had supinely awaited the outcome with the calm indifference of the selfish-hearted being that she was.

"Yes, if it hadn't been for a good old soul, I wouldn't be in this world," replied Punch; but failed to give credit to the devotional care of the little woman who loved him so well, for fear, probably, that it would inflame in the bosom of this handsome woman a jealousy that would fling his hopes to the wind.

Not yet had he been sufficiently lessoned in the bitter school of experience to shun this evil woman, who, in her desperate effort to save herself from everlasting disgrace, thought nothing of sacrificing others in doing so. So deep-seated was Punch's infatuation for this woman, and so blinded was he in believing that she loved him, now that she had sent for him, that his passion for her was renewed with the fury of a tempest. Julia was well aware of this, and of her dire influence over him, and gloried in her power, like a strong man. This is why she had sent for him.

"I wrote to you, Mr. Brooks, to see if you couldn't help me out of my troubles. You know I had some words with Mrs. Donnan a few weeks ago, and while Mrs. Donnan is a good lady, she is just like fire and tow. I'm hot tempered, too; so when she said somethin' one mornin' I didn't like, I objected. Then she flew off into such abuse of myself and my race, that I quit. It was hard, because I had lived there all my life."

"I'm very sorry to hear of your trouble. But then you know I'm in the same fix and, how in the

world can I be of any use to you, I would like to know," replied Punch.

"Why, in this way: You can go to the manager of the company for which you worked, and find if he can give me work in the office, or in collecting for the company. I'm sick and tired of housework, and I want a change. At present I'm stayin' here with Florence; but while I'm welcome as long as I choose to stay, I've got to eat, and wear clothes, and have somewhere to sleep, so I've got to work. So promise me you'll go and see the manager for me and try your very best to get me something to do."

In the utterance of these words she had taken advantage of all her enchanting power. She had assumed a languishing position in her chair, had permitted far too much of her matchless ankle to be seen, and upon saying the last words had softened her voice to a whisper, and she looked about her as if she had something more to add. But the mellifluous voice was silent until Punch encouraged her, as he thought, by saying:

"What did you start to say?"

"Nothin' much."

"Yes it was. What was it? Out with it. I won't go a step till you tell me what you started to say."

He seized her hands, which she pretended to withdraw, but latterly gave up the struggle and permitted the passionate young fellow to have his provoking way, while the owner of the hands kept wondering where Florence could be and what a capital witness she would make in event the worst came to the worst.

"I was just goin' to say," and she tantalizingly drawled out the words, "that if you did this for me that I would try mighty hard to love you."

"You will, Julia? Why, you know I would go to the end of the world for you! But, stop! You sha'n't work, not as long as I am able to do so. I

have just come back here, and I, too, am in search of somethin' to do; but, Julia, if you can keep body and soul together until I find work, you won't have to work if you promise me one thing."

Julia's eyes glistened in joyful anticipation, and she ceased breathing for a moment.

"Promise me, Julia—" he had begun, but the street door was suddenly opened, and Florence came in. The sudden noise had caused Punch to involuntarily rise from his seat, and the sentence that he had begun was destined to remain forever incomplete.

"Why, Jim Brooks! I certainly am glad to see you. I heard you had been very sick, but I hope you are entirely well by this," greeted Florence.

"Yes, much obliged. I am all right now, but I was most gone at one time, they tell me."

"What have you and Julia been doin'; renewin' old acquaintances, eh?"

"Yes. I found a letter from her as soon as I got to Richmond, and thinkin' she had changed her mind somewhat, I thought I would come round and see how she was gettin' along. I hear she has left her old place too."

Florence nodded, and looked at Julia quizzically, for the latter had walked over to a window and was looking out in a preoccupied manner.

"You say you got a letter from her?"

"Yes; this mornin'."

Florence was thoughtful a moment, then changed the subject.

"By the way, have you seen Still Lawson lately?" she presently asked.

"No; why?"

"Because a certain young lady would like very much to set eyes on him again. She hasn't seen him for weeks."

"Who do you mean?" asked Punch.

"Mean, you blockhead; who should I mean?" and she nodded toward Julia.

"What, is she still in love with that fellow?" asked Punch, his very heart sinking with a faintness that made him sick.

"Why, you blind numskull, of course she is; and though he has gone the Lord knows where, she would follow him if she had to sell every rag on her back if she knew where to go."

"I don't believe it!" and the impetuous young man was about to appeal to Julia for a refutation of Florence's statement, when the latter siezed him by the arm, saying:

"Stop; don't say anything to her now, but wait, and you'll see presently that what I tell you is so." The undertone in which Florence said this prevented Julia from hearing her.

After some trivial talk, scarcely worthy being recorded here, Punch set out to again secure work. He went to see the manager of the company for which he had formerly worked. The manager appeared very glad to see him, and remarked that he was not looking as well as usual. Punch told of his misfortunes, and of his determination in future to give up the dissipated life he had been leading.

"I am very glad to hear it, Brooks, and I hope you will hold out and keep your good resolutions."

Punch thanked him, and then approached him concerning the position for Julia.

"Ha ha" laughed the manager; "so that's the way the wind blows is it? I thought you would come to this before long." Punch felt a suffusion of blood to his face, and he felt some hesitancy in venturing further but his good-natured tease encouraged him, and he told of the girl's misfortune.

"You might tell her to come to see me; and if I possibly can, I will give her somethin' to do. By the way, what are you doin' now?"

"Nothin'."

"I thought you were goin' to ask for your old place again, but instead you seem to be an agent for somebody else."

"That's no reason I don't want work, for I do. I have just got to Richmond, and this is the first place I've been, and I came here because Julia asked me to see you for her, and I promised that I would."

"Then what are you goin' to do?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you come with the company again? I haven't been able to get a man that could do the work satisfactorily since you left."

"I was afraid you would turn me down. Then, you hadn't asked me either. That's why."

"Well, if you are willin' to start fresh and to give up the habits that almost ruined you, you can begin work to-morrow mornin'."

Punch was too filled with emotion to express his gratitude in words, but took the extended hand of his generous employer, briefly thanked him, and promised to be on hand in the morning.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PUNCH FINDS HIMSELF IN A PREDICAMENT.

Punch, after the interview with the company's manager, went directly to Florence's, where he told of his good fortune to Julia, who seemed not as cheerful as she might have been at hearing of his success in securing work for both.

"Hi, I didn't know you had left there. I thought you had been sick, and that your place was kept for you." Julia knew that what she said was untrue, but she felt that she must say something.

"Oh no; I left there long before I was taken sick."

"Did you? Now I come to think of it, I believe somebody did tell me about it."

"Now tell me, Jim, what are you goin' to do to-night?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"I haven't been out anywhere in I can't tell when, and you don't know how sick and tired I am of stayin' here in the house. Let's go out."

"I will, on one condition," said Punch, his heart fairly aflame with passion.

"And what is it?" she asked, with a faint degree of haughtiness in her tone.

"That you—" and Punch conveyed the meaning of the rest of the sentence in pantomime by pursing up his lips and outstretching his arms.

With a fetching smile and a skip she flung herself in ruthless abandon into his arms, and he kissed her rapturously, ferociously, but again, luckily, Florence did not see them.

The two went out, and Punch squandered his last cent upon trifles for Julia, and this young woman accepted his offerings as a matter of course. They went to the theater together, where Julia was at great pains to speak to all the acquaintances she saw, and labored hard to keep up the conversation, for Punch had lapsed into his old fault of saying little.

When they returned to Florence's that young woman had gone to bed, and when awakened to permit her guest to enter appeared to be in not so sweet a temper as usual.

Punch left and went to his lodgings at Charity's for the night, promising to stop by in the morning and go with Julia to her new place. Before departing, however, Julia rewarded him with a furtive kiss just as Florence opened the door, and she had therefore been simply an aural witness of what had just happened. It was quite sufficient, however, to give a deeper insight into the fickle and frivolous character of Julia, and she was glad indeed that she had so soon been made aware of the existing circumstances. She had known of Julia's former treatment of Punch, and of that young man's desperation; later of Still's attentions, and Julia's duplicity. And now that Still had for some cause or other unaccountably disappeared, for Julia to so soon appear to forget him was too much for her to understand. So she ventured to her couch and to sleep, determined to decide on what course to pursue by the morrow. She had more than an inkling of Julia's plans, because before Punch had appeared the girl had seemed worried, and brooded over what Florence at first supposed the loss of her home; but as soon as Punch returned she seemed another body altogether. Without making known her suspicions to anybody, she determined to await the outcome of events, and ascertain more positively, if possible, Julia's intentions.

Morning came, and Punch was as prompt as lovers usually are; that is, he was at least a half hour too early, and in consequence found Julia hardly yet arisen. Florence was bustling about getting breakfast when Punch knocked, and being belated seemed not in the best of humor. Her cheerful mood returned, however, as she caught sight of the familiar figure. She told him to come in, and while she got breakfast they talked.

"Where's Julia? Is she ready yet?" asked Punch.

"Ready; no, she ain't ready. I don't reckon she's up yet. Julia! Julia! Why in the name of gracious don't you get up!" called Florence up the stairway, for she appeared to be capable of doing more things in a given time than anybody he had known.

"What?" came in muffled tones from above, as if emitted from the depths of a feather bed.

"Get up! Jim is down here waitin', and breakfast is ready. Get up, you lazy hussy! Take a seat, Jim, and wait awhile; Julia 'll be down presently."

Punch did as he was asked, while Florence cheerfully continued her culinary operations.

"Hi, Jim, it looks like she's goin' to take you back, don't it?" said Florence, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, as she paused a moment to rest. "She certainly does look pleased, I tell you she does. I haven't seen her look so happy since long before Still Lawson left here."

"Let Still Lawson go to the devil, Florence! I'm tired of hearin' his name. Everyway I turn it's Still Lawson this, or when Still was here, or some other wonder that Still did, until I am sick and tired of hearin' it."

Punch spoke in considerable heat, and Florence took advantage of his disturbed equanimity to fill his mind with her own suspicions, of Julia's trickery. The twinkle in her eye had disappeared, and instead her face assumed a serious air as she spoke.

"Julia looks like she thinks a heap of you, Jim; but that woman is a long ways ahead of me. I thought that time you went with her that yo' all would be married inside of six months, but before long Still started to come around here, and you stopped; and when I asked Julia about it she said, I believe, she said, she was tired of you."

"It's a lie, Florence Banks! She didn't say any such thing, I'll stake my life on it!"

Punch spoke excitedly, and had arisen from his chair as he began speaking, and was pacing about the room, getting in the way of Florence, who peremptorily bade him:

"Set down, Jim, and stop talkin' so loud. Tain't while to tell everybody on the street. Then I reckon you better hear all I got to tell you before you get in such a hurry to call me a liar." Florence spoke sharply now, and Punch, who had so far forgotten himself as to question the truth of what she was saying, immediately begged pardon for his offense. Florence's ruffled feathers were accordingly smoothed, and she continued as if she had not been interrupted.

"And so she kept on goin' with Still. But he didn't come anything like as often as you did, and some times for two or three weeks he wouldn't come near her. Julia would write to him, and telephone to him, but he didn't seem to pay hardly any attention to her. But she loved him, and I'm just as sure of that as I am that I'm livin'. And that ain't all—that gal loves Still Lawson yet, just like I've told you before. I don't know how far you and she have gone about makin' friends again, but don't you let her pull the wool over your eyes no more, because Still Lawson might come to life again, and then—"

"Hush, Florence, hush! You always see what nobody else can. Julia loves me, and I am happy. If she tires of me by to-morrow, I will be happy

to-day, because I know—I know, do you understand?—that she loves me."

"Well, all I've got to say is if you know what Julia is goin' to do next, it's more than she, or I, or anybody else knows. Now you just mark what I tell you: Julia is up to some of her devilment, and I want to tell you that now, because if anything happens you can't blame me."

"G'way, Florence; nothin' is goin' to happen. I didn't know you were so easy to suspect anybody."

"You never mind. I ain't goin' to tell everything I know, and less still of what I think about you and Julia. I know she is a fine girl, good lookin', and all that, but that ain't all."

"Why, Florence, I never heard of you talkin' against a friend of yours before. What have you got against Julia?"

"Nothin' in the world. I think a heap of Julia, but I just want to put a certain young man that I know in possession of his senses, and not allow him to be tangled up without a full knowledge of what he is doin'."

Punch was silent awhile, as if doubtful of her meaning, then said inquiringly:

"Then you think she loves me?"

"No, I don't mean that; but she might marry you, in fact I believe Julia is anxious to marry."

"Well, she won't have long to wait, if she'll have me."

"Humph, that's what I've been knowin' I don't know how long."

"Well, Florence, you are the most aggravatin' woman I ever did see. How come you haven't said so before."

"'Cause 'tain't none of my business, that's why. I ain't no match-maker," and she haughtily sniffed the air, as if it had been a mortal sin to be that useful but self-abnegating personage.

"Hush! Here she comes," said Florence, as Julia appeared at the head of the stairs.

"What did you come round here wakin' everybody up so soon for, Jim Brooks?" inquired Julia as she espied Punch, and lazily drew a chair to the table.

"Because it's high time you were at work, young lady," replied Florence, who saved Punch from replying to a rather awkward question, for which he was accordingly thankful.

"I don't care if it is, Florence; I didn't ask you," retorted Julia. While smiling, still enough of her meaning was conveyed to Florence to acquaint her with the fact that she was in earnest, therefore little more was said. Julia soon announced herself ready, and the two set out together, and in due course arrived at the office of the insurance company.

Punch was soon in his old harness again, while Julia was assigned some writing to do. When noontime came Punch could not forbear laughing at her, for she, being unaccustomed to such work, had spoiled innumerable blanks, had upset the ink more than once, and in attempting to repair the damage done thereby had succeeded in besmearing her face and hands and immaculate apron with the grimy fluid.

"Stop laughin' at me, you devil you!" exclaimed Julia as she caught sight of his face. It was said in scarcely a provoked manner, but instead seemed an invitation to say more.

Punch did say more, but for very fear of being refused he did not ask Julia to marry him. He had encountered so many rebuffs at this woman's hands that he chose rather to endure the torture of suspense than again undergo the agony of a refusal. Thus he continued to defer asking the question that Julia's ears were tingling to hear, just as boys have been known to do when eating pie. They assail the crust first, and nibble away at the pie until it is gone, so that the joy derived from its consumption may be extended to the utmost limit.

A month had gone by since Julia's first appearance in the office, and before this time had elapsed there began to be vague whisperings among the other employes of the office, especially among the women, concerning Julia. Her handsome face and magnificent figure had been a source of constant envy, and from the time of her connection with the office she had been tormented by the head of the department in which she worked, until she was on the verge of giving up her position. This woman soon discovered that all was not quite right with Julia, and with a woman's probity in such matters determined that she would discover all that could possibly be ascertained concerning Julia's private affairs, because she was very certain Julia was not a proper person to be employed in the office. She waited with patience, even after others whispered the matter about, and even went so far as to appear to doubt current report. Julia being constantly under her eye, she determined by the end of the month to lay the matter before the manager. Accordingly, she appeared one morning and desired to have a word or two with him. This personage wheeled about in his big office chair and simply said:

"Well."

Without sitting, she asked:

"I want to ask if Julia White is married?"

"No, not that I know of. Why?"

"Why? Because she ought to be, that's why. Go look at her. The hussy, what business has she got sneakin' in here, I want to know?"

"Hold on, hold on. Now you go right back. Don't say a word to anybody."

"Say a word, why everybody in the office knows it, and—"

"Never mind, you send Brooks in here, and when he comes out ask Julia to come this way."

The woman disappeared, and in a few minutes Punch appeared at the door.

"Here, Brooks, come in. Sit down over there, I want to talk to you."

Punch drew up a chair, wondering all the while what new calamity was about to be visited upon his unhappy head, when his employer suddenly asked:

"Brooks, is Julia White married?"

Punch was so astonished at having so unexpected a question propounded, that he paused suspiciously long before replying.

"No."

"How long have you known her?"

"Several years. Why?"

"Never mind. Have you been goin' with her regularly?"

"Yes; but why?"

"I say never mind why. It's because I want to know. Certain facts have been made known to me concerning her, and I think you as well, and it is merely the interest I have in you that prompts me to ask."

"But I don't know what you are drivin' at. But if you are tryin' to make me say somethin' against the girl, you had just as well stop now, for I wouldn't do it for nothin' in the world, even if I knew it to tell. Even you may be led to believe from the manner in which I reply to your questions that these lies bein' told about her are the truth; but I can't help what you believe. I know they are lies, and I would like to say so to the face of the one who started the rumor."

"Why, you know well enough what I want to speak to you about. So you have heard the gossip about Julia and yourself?"

"The devil you say! What do you mean, man?"

Punch had unconsciously arisen from his seat, and as he asked the question had caught his employer by the shoulder with such a terrible grip that his fingers buried like talons therein. The

manager firmly withdrew the hand from his shoulder, pointed him to a seat, and said:

"Look here, Brooks, if it is not one thing it is another. Now you answer me these questions, and if they are satisfactory you remain here. Unless you are blind, you can't help seein' that which is painfully plain to everybody."

Punch was moodily silent. He had been haunted for a week or two with gloomy suspicions, besides being daily harassed on account of the rumors, whisperings, mysterious glances, and arching of brows.

"Are you ready to answer my questions?"

"Yes," was the sullen response.

"How long had you been goin' with Julia when you came to work here a month ago?"

"A day or two," was the reply.

"But you had been goin' with her before, hadn't you?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"About six months ago."

"Then you hadn't been goin' with her for six months until about a month ago?"

"No."

"Do you know who had been?"

"Yes; Still Lawson. But he has mysteriously disappeared. Nobody knows where he is."

"You declare upon your word of honor that what you tell me is true?"

"Yes."

With the air of an attorney the manager declared his interrogatories over, and told Punch to return to his work, which the latter did after the manner of an automaton.

Directly after, Julia entered the manager's office. She was conscious of being the disturbing cause of the intestine strife in the office, and on confronting her employer she stood abashed before him.

"Miss Julia, I sent for you because certain facts

have been made known to me that I cannot tell you how much it has pained me to have had to listen to. You, of course, know what I have reference to. That you, a young woman of such fine promise, should ever think of stoopin' to such folly, is more than I can understand."

Julia had hung her head for very shame, and tears trickled to the office floor. But she was silent.

"If I knew the scoundrel that is responsible for your misfortune he should make full reparation by marryin' you, or feel the power of the law."

Julia looked up. Her face was brighter, indeed the tears were dry in a moment, and she exclaimed almost loud enough to be heard in the next room:

"You do know him."

"Who is it, then?"

"Jimi Brooks."

The manager half arose, opened his mouth with astonishment, and sat down again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“THERE’S MANY A SLIP—”

When the manager had somewhat recovered from his astonishment at having heard Julia’s utterances which have been set down in the previous chapter, he asked:

“Do you then declare, upon your honest word, that what you say is true?”

Julia proudly drew herself up as she replied:
“I ain’t been in the habit of lyin’.”

“That may be, but you know anybody can be mistaken.”

“Mistaken!” and she laughed one of those harsh, discordant, metallic laughs, that grated upon the ears, and which contained no mirth, as she replied:

“Mistaken! Why, man, you must take me for a fool, or simpleton. Do you think I could be mistaken, when I have all the evidence in the world to prove this man’s love for me? But for some reason he has put me off with first one excuse and then another until now, with promises of marriage, until my shame is known to all.”

Here Julia’s overwrought feelings gave way, and she cried again.

“Here, Julia, I don’t know which of you is to blame, but stop cryin’. Now you know that this is a matter that I’ll have to touch with the greatest care, in fact I had best not touch at all for the present. So I’m going to drop the matter just here. In the meantime, talk with young Brooks, and if he is willin’ to mend the wrong he has done you by marriage, I will see to it that he will not suffer any loss as far as his work here is concerned. As for

yourself, while I am sorry to say so, very sorry, yet it is my duty to the others here in the office, and that is to tell you that I can't employ you any longer. I think you will find this correct," and he placed a sealed envelope in her hand, containing her pay up to and including this eventful day.

Julia listened listlessly to what the manager had to say, nor did she apparently care the least for the discharge, or for the disgrace that was inseparable from it. She was becoming accustomed to such. She said to the manager as she was about to go:

"It won't make any difference to me whether I stay here or no. If I can't work at one place, I can at another. And if these folks in this house are too good to work under the same roof with me, they can go to the devil. What have they got to do with me." Like an avalanche in its headlong course down the mountain side, the more Julia said, the more bitter her words became, and the greater became her indignation the more she thought upon the subject.

The manager arose and went to the door, saying in an unruffled manner:

"It's no use, Julia, to get mad. I have not treated you badly; you can blame nobody but yourself."

Julia flashed one of those sidelong, lecherous glances, in which was embodied scorn and contempt for the man who had given her friendly advice. She felt just then that it was the most superfluous and least wanted of all earthly commodities.

Going straight to Florence's, and that young woman being out, she entered and flung herself face downward on the bed to plan how best to ensnare Punch into marrying her. She was well aware that he had been made cognizant of her predicament, and she soon came to the conclusion that whatever she intended doing she must do with deliberation and celerity. Accordingly she went to her trunk, and after a few minutes' rummaging in search of something, brought forth a packet of

letters tied about with a piece of pink ribbon. The hard knot she untied with her teeth, and then, sitting flat upon the floor, proceeded to select from the packet those that best suited her purpose. The letters were those of Punch written to her during that former mad period of his, when he was so far distracted with passion for her that he was hardly conscious of what he was committing to paper.

She could not suppress a proud look of triumph when she found a letter in which Punch implored her to marry him, and in which he promised the most enduring faith and love, embellished with the most extravagant language, such as lovers have been known to be guilty of long before the time of this history. She slipped this particular one into her bosom, and then sought one of his later letters, written since the renewal of their friendship. This being found, she removed the letter from its envelope and replaced it with the one in which he had asked her to marry him. This letter bore no date, but simply the day of the week. Feeling assured that she possessed sufficient evidence to oblige Punch to marry her, she tore the later letter into bits and flung the scraps away. She had scarcely done this when there was a knock at the door. She went to see who it was, and, seeming surprised to find Punch, simply said, "Come in."

Punch followed her into the sitting-room without a word. Once there he began:

"Julia, what is all this they are sayin' about you up at the office? I didn't know you had left there. I didn't see you go, and when six o'clock came I went to look for you, and found you had already gone. Why did you go; were you sick?"

"Yes, I was feelin' badly; but I have worked when I was feelin' worse."

"What made you leave then?"

"Do you really want to know?" asked Julia, thinking to arouse his sympathy by exhibiting some display of feeling at being discharged. She accord-

ingly began crying, which so far touched upon the sensibilities of Punch that he was well satisfied that some gross injustice had been done the unhappy girl, and he was ready to return immediately to the office, and not only give the manager such a scolding as he had never heard before, but a thrashing as well.

"Yes, I want to know," he replied.

"I—I am afraid to tell you, Jim. I know you will hate me like everybody does. I declare I can't see why everybody loves to see me suffer so much. Everywhere I go somebody's got to say something against me, until I am almost ready to go dis-tracted."

"But what made you leave the office so suddenly this evenin'?"

"Because—because. I can't tell you, Jim," and Julia sobbed outright, and hid her head on Punch's shoulder.

This action seemed to inspire her confidence, since Punch not only allowed her head to remain there, but put his arm about her. Therefore she argued to herself that he did not despise her, and she nestled yet closer.

"Why can't you tell me, Julia?"

"Because I'm afraid you will blame me, when God knows I haven't done anything to cause me to be discharged. There, now; I told you before I thought of myself."

"Discharged! What for? Why, the manager didn't say anything about it to me. Hold on. He asked me if you were married and I told him no. What did he discharge you for, Julia? He had some reason, didn't he?"

"Yes, but I can't tell you. Because I might cause trouble between you," she added.

"The devil take the trouble! Tell me what was the cause of your discharge, Julia, or I'll go and knock this man down and let him explain afterwards. Tell me, I say!"

Punch had become angered at what he thought to be an insult to Julia, and was burning to resent it. They were standing apart now. Punch walked uneasily back and forth, eagerly awaiting Julia's reply. She, with face averted, seemed in despair. At last she exclaimed, as she saw the uselessness of longer keeping Punch in ignorance of the cause of her discharge.

"Tain't while to beat around the bush any further, Jim. I was discharged because the others in the office thought themselves too good to work with me."

"Why, what have you done? Stop, I'll go this minute and see the manager and find out, if I can, what he treated you so for."

"No, you sit right there," said Julia, pointing to a chair. "Now, tell me what the manager said to you this evenin' when you went to see him. You did go, didn't you?"

Punch nodded in reply.

"Yes; and he asked me a number of questions about you which I thought rather impertinent. I believe he asked me if you were married, and when I said no, his face changed in a peculiar way. He also asked how long I had been goin' with you, and I told him. Then he asked me if I had heard the rumors about you in the office, and I forget what my reply was, but I do know that I felt very mad at him, but he talked calmly to me afterwards, and I thought no more about it. Still I have been worried concernin' you, and I want to hear from you a denial of these lies I have heard. Tell me the truth, Julia, and I'll believe you. But if you falsify to me, I'll never trust you again. Once, Julia, I trusted you as men have not often trusted women before, and you deceived me. I've been afraid to do so again, but I will now, Julia, for the woman is yourself, and I love you."

"Well, since you urge the truth I will tell it to you. The rumor about the office is briefly this:

Young Jim Brooks finds work for a certain young woman to do in an insurance office, and plays the part of a sweetheart so well, that when certain facts become known that ought to remain secret, at least, until marriage, people begin to talk. And—”

Punch, listening breathlessly, interrupted her here with an oath that was so forcibly and vehemently uttered that it made her start.

“It’s a lie! What, Julia, you tell me this before my face, and not ashamed to look at me! And you listen to this, and remain in that nest of back-bitin’ vipers! What are you if you haven’t got more self-respect than to hear it? You are no more than a woman of the streets—when you let them talk about you in this manner without makin’ every one of them swallow their words!”

Julia was speechless. She sank into a chair as if conscience-stricken, and remained so an instant. She was so long making reply to the latter reproach of Punch, that he was beginning to suspect that reports were true. Her retort, however, left him no cause for further doubt concerning her purposes.

“Well, as far as I was concerned, I knew the rumor to be true. But—”

If Punch had sworn before with vehemence, he interrupted Julia here with such an oath, followed by others, that caused her to cry in a ringing voice, kindling with anger:

“Now stop interruptin’ me, Jim Brooks! You can hear what I’ve got to say and then swear as much as you please, but wait and do so out of doors.” Continuing, she said: “But I’ve been waitin’ for this young man to prevent this disgrace to his name and my own by marryin’ me, but he has not done so. And this evenin’, just before the manager told me to find work somewhere else, he asked me the name of the man who had been my lover. I didn’t tell him at first, but when he said it would be known anyhow before long, and if I

told perhaps he could help to secure my marriage and save me—"

"What name did you give him, Julia?" Punch interrupted ferociously.

"Now, didn't I tell you to stop interruptin' me? Wait and I'll tell you. He said that he would see justice done me in case my lover failed to comply with my wishes."

"The name, woman! What name?"

"The name of the man who is to marry me is James Brooks."

"What, you brazen wench! Do you dare say this before my face, when you know every word you utter is a lie, a most cowardly and contemptible lie. You have told the manager all that! Have told him that I promised to marry you, and if I refused the law would compel me to do so; the leavin's of somebody else!"

"Julia, beautiful as you are, and as much as I have loved you, I have a great mind to kill you this minute and be hanged for it! I see now how you have tricked me into lovin', after I had almost forgotten you, for the only purpose of savin' you from disgrace. But I'll see you and Still Lawson lower than you are now before I'll be fool enough to marry you. My madness for you is turned into such bitter hatred that for the sufferin' you have caused me I could kick you like a dog! From now on you go your way and I'll go mine, but never let me see your face again!"

Julia had assumed an air of cool indifference to the embittered language of Punch, and waited until he had finished, with patience not characteristic of her.

When he had finished, great beads of sweat stood on his forehead, the veins about his neck and face looked like cords, and he was so hoarse with suppressed anger that he could scarcely utter.

Her coolness and apparent indifference to his anguish so exasperated Punch that he might have

done her bodily injury had not his abhorrence of criminal acts stayed him.

"Now that I have heard you through with patience, and have listened to words from you that I would have slapped another in the mouth for, I have a right to be heard. You say that you will not marry me because at one time I loved somebody else. Well, what of that? Others as good as you and I have done likewise, and marriage has been made a veil to hide a heap behind, that we would like to forget. I confess I loved Still, but so did I love you; and surely because of this lapse on my part you would not forget what you once were to me. Marry me, Jim, and leave the place where you now work. Let's go to the North, and I'll do anything to earn a livin'. Or we could say we were secretly married and nobody would know the difference. The manager told me himself he would see to it that you 'lost nothin' by marryin' me."

Here Julia flung herself into one of those voluptuous attitudes which were so irresistible to Punch, and as he looked upon her he was tempted for the moment to fling to the wind all honor, self-respect, and morals, in his mad infatuation for her, and to declare her his own forevermore. However, he resisted, with becoming fortitude, the wiles of the devil and the witchery of his emissary as he turned away, saying:

"What in Satan's name do you suppose I care for what you or the manager may do in the matter? What do I care what other people think or do concernin' myself or you? They can all go to the devil. I have lost every jot of love I ever had for you, Julia, since you have made known to me your villainous plan to entrap me in a marriage that was dishonorable to me, and for the sole purpose of shieldin' yourself, and to acknowledge your own and Still's villainy as mine. Humph, the way you led me up to the trap you must have thought me

the easiest deceived poor fool in the world, but you have undone all your work in a blunderin' fashion, and I see clearly now what you have been up to for a month or two. I am not caught yet, Julia, and since I've seen the hook I never will be. You can depend upon that."

"Never mind about you, wait and see." And Julia mysteriously nodded her head. "Somebody will see you by to-morrow, and then we will see who has the upperhand, you or I."

"Julia, I never thought when I first came to know you that you would have had the heart to treat me as you have done. Now I believe you could do anything, however mean and vile."

"Maybe I could, if it became necessary in carryin' out what I intended," calmly replied she.

"Oh, you heartless devil! I believe you. Henceforth I never want to see you again." And he moved toward the door.

She did not interpose to stop him, but said in a jocular way:

"Of course I'm heartless, I've been told so a thousand times by men who were better than you. As for bein' a devil, I'd as soon be one as some people I know, especially one you would call handsome. As for never wantin' to see my face again. Why, yes you do. Maybe you will see it again, whether you want to or no."

Punch continued his progress toward the door, still silent.

"So you will leave me anyhow, eh? Well, good-by. What, you won't say good-by, and won't kiss me? What sort of a lover are you, boy?"

For reply, Punch clapped on his hat and walked away.

Julia took from her bosom Punch's letter, read it over, and replaced it, the old smile of triumph overspreading her handsome though malicious face.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STILL MAKES A PURCHASE AND USES IT.

We shall now return, for awhile, to Still Lawson and his affairs. Julia, it will be remembered, had not seen him more than a few times after his disastrous adventure with Jude, when he gave her an evasive reason for certain ugly abrasions on his head and face, and soon after disappeared altogether as if the earth had swallowed him up. For reasons best known to himself he saw fit to pack his trunk and quietly disappear, as the saying goes, "between two days," without any notice of his intentions of so doing being made at the office. Whether it was due to ignominy on account of being thwarted by the innocent girl from the country, or to a consciousness of Julia's condition and the possibility of his being involved in her affairs, did he longer delay his departure, will probably never be known to the reader, although to one of Still's inordinate pride to be found, as he was, a woman's man and a general favorite, flung out of a window by a little country wench whom few in the house where she had been taken could say a word of favor concerning either her good looks or amorous disposition, one naturally would be led to believe that it was on the latter account and none other. At any rate he did not appear at this infamous house again after that night. He never could forget the laughter of denizens belonging to this establishment as well as others in the neighborhood.

He was badly stunned by the fall he had, although he alighted on a bank of snow; but the crash of glass following the heated words in the room occupied by Jude brought Ophelia to her feet in an instant. There was a rush to see what had happened, and as she opened the door leading into the hall a woman's figure disappeared through the outer doorway, while the unfortunate who was so considerably jostled by the desperate woman in her flight appeared to have lost her wits.

"What's that?" exclaimed the Derricote woman.

"I don't know, unless that little country piece you brought here has gone crazy and broken up everything in her room. I know she came down the steps like she was goin' to a fire."

"Was that who it was, goin' out in such a hurry?"

"Yes, I thought you knew that."

"Don't you think so much. Has that young fool come that made me bring her here?"

"Yes, he came sometime ago, and went to her room, I believe."

"Where is he now?"

"How do I know. Upstairs, I reckon."

Without more ado everybody trooped up to Jude's room to find the gas burning brightly, an overturned chair or two, and the lower window sash broken away, and glass scattered about the carpet. Otherwise, nothing was disturbed.

The women looked horrified at what evidently was a tragedy, and the men looked puzzled. Ophelia exclaimed, "In the name of—" But she did not stop to finish the sentence, but flew down the stairway and out of doors, where in the dim light she made out the figure of a man. Lights were hurriedly brought, and Still, just reviving from the effect of having the breath knocked soundly out of him, struggled to his feet, muttering to himself curses upon the head of his tormentor. These were sufficiently loud to be heard by those

gathered about him, and Ophelia took advantage of his awkward position to taunt him with being such a blundering lover.

"Hi, man, you let a little minx do you like that; throw you out of the window like a sick kitten? Ha, ha," and she burst into a laugh, which was echoed by the others, who saw how cleverly Still had been turned upon in his villainy, and if the truth were known sympathized with the author of his discomfort. As for Still, he was infuriated to such a degree that he was capable of venting his wrath on the most innocent.

"Shut up, you hell hounds, or I'll knock every grinnin' tooth out of your heads. What have you got to do with it, even if my neck was broken?"

"Nothin' at all, Still Lawson, except I keep a reputable house, that's all, and I don't propose havin' people fightin' and scratchin' here and windin' it up by bein' flung out of windows. I'm mighty glad the ambulance didn't have to come, not on your account, but on mine," she announced as she coolly left Still standing there, and walked in the house, followed by her dependent troop. A moment after she opened the door just far enough to say: "Send a man round here to fix that window to-morrow, and get that nigger's rags out of here."

Still began a reply, but she was gone before he could think of the most scathing thing in his mind to say. With his brain in a turmoil, and maddened to a frenzied rage, he set out up the street as if in pursuit of Jude, forgetting his overcoat and hat, and oblivious of the cold. He was so determined upon the conquest of Jude that had he found her there is no telling to what end he would not have permitted his unbridled passion to lead him.

Since Jude had so heroically defended herself from his dastardly approaches, we are by no means certain that had her assailant not been taken by surprise the result might have been far otherwise. Fortunately, he did not find her, although in her

confusion she became lost, and so fearful lest she was pursued, she slunk into any convenient dark corner whenever she heard footsteps. And when she took occasion to do this for the last time, whom should there pass but her persecutor, for which she murmured a prayer of thanks. When his footfalls had died away she crept forth and went in a contrary direction.

By what means such information is communicated is a mystery, but when Still appeared at the bank next morning several clerks remarked his scarred face, and smilingly asked the cause, just as if it had been the most amusing thing in the world to have a fall on the ice, for instance. One, more impertinent than the rest, ventured too far with his joking by saying:

"I hear you walked out of your window in your sleep last night, Lawson. What's the matter wi—"

"Look here, you meddlesome scoundrel, say another word and I'll choke your tongue out! What do you fools mean?" With this he seized hold of the offender's throat in desperation, and might have made good his word had he not been pulled away in time.

"If ever you say anything to me except upon a matter of business, I'll knock you down!"

"Humph," ejaculated the innocent offender, "you must be sore about something; but I'll thank you, Still Lawson, to keep your hand out of my collar."

"And you learn to keep your mouth out of my business hereafter." With this, Still sullenly went to his work, and the incident soon blew over.

Affairs were as prosaic as usual about the bank a week later, and Still had come regularly to work; but one morning he did not come, and nothing was thought of it. The second day a messenger to his boarding-house brought information that he had gone out of the city. His books were examined and found entirely correct. Then why

should he leave so suddenly? was asked by many. Several of the young bloods knew the reason, or at least thought they knew.

During the years Still had been working he had managed to accumulate a few hundred dollars, and he argued that he could afford to lose his position, since he had grown tired of it. Arriving at this conclusion, he determined upon a visit to the country, for he was confident Jude had returned, or at least would make the utmost effort to return home at the earliest opportunity. Of course we know that he was mistaken. The severe treatment that he had received at the hands of this muscular young woman seemed to stimulate his ambition for still another display of his prowess in overcoming her foolish notions concerning maidenly propriety and scruples. Therefore, he resolved upon another assault against her. This time he set about with more care than he had exerted hitherto, to conquer the presuming young thing that had dared to match herself against such a master of deception as he knew himself to be.

Without informing anybody, he set about preparing for his journey. In passing by one of the pawn shops on lower Main Street one day he happened to look into the window of one, and saw displayed the usual miscellaneous aggregation of knives, tools, guns, pistols, etc. A particularly handsome pistol was shown, and he suddenly became aware that he needed one. What would he not need more now that he was going to the country, where anybody might see cause to provoke a quarrel and he not have means to defend himself. He stepped into the store, inquired the price, was surprised at the cheapness of the weapon, and bought it.

A day or two later he was standing on the platform at Cloverdale, looking idly at the departing train as it disappeared in a cloud of smoke. When the motley crowd had gradually disappeared from

the station, Still went into the waiting-room to warm himself. There by the cracked wood stove he stood, when Henry, who still retained his position as factotum in ordinary, came in. He politely doffed his old felt hat in greeting the well-dressed man from town, evidently mistaking him for a drummer. A moment afterward he became aware of his mistake, and endeavored to correct his blunder by saying:

"Excuse me, seh, but I took yo' fer sumbody else."

"I saw that at first. But can you tell me how I can get down the country some eight or ten miles? Are there any teams for hire about here?"

"Yas, seh, dar's plenty er teams; but den nobody ain' gwine be fool ernuff ter let yo' drive dey horse thoo' dat mud twix heah an'— An' whar yo' say yo' wus gwine, enyhow?"

"I didn't say where I was goin', but only that I was goin' several miles in the country."

"Humph, dat don' mek er bit er diffunce which way yo' go, dar ain' but two ways ter git way fum dis place 'dout gittin' in mud, an' dat er plenty un hit too."

"And what two ways are these?"

There was a twinkle in Henry's eye as he replied:

"By de river, er thoo de a'r."

He was disappointed that the stranger had not confided to him the particular place to which he was going, which had he seen fit to do means might have been provided for the continuance of his journey.

Still could not brook joking, and he said rather sharply:

"Here, young man, I must go to the country, and unless you tell me where I can get a horse, somebody else can. I haven't got the time to wait around here until mornin'."

"Waal, hit jes' lek I tell you, nobody heah ain'

gwine let yo' have a horse dis late in de day, an' yo' er stranger, too."

Still was thinking where he might be able to find quarters for the night, so he asked Henry if he knew.

"Dar ain' nowhar' fer yo' ter stay 'round dis place dat I know un, 'dout, dat is—"

What?"

With that intuition, or free masonry, call it what you will, Henry had determined Still of impure blood, and soon looked upon him more as an equal than a superior.

"I wus jes' gwine ter say ef yo' don' min' I got er baid in de depo', an' yo' mout stay dar ef yo' wan' ter."

"Well—I don't want to take your bed, but if I must stay here to-night, and you can tell me where to get some supper, I will be obliged if you will let me sit by the stove in the depot, since you don't keep fire in the waitin'-room at night, do you?"

"Nuh; but g'way man, whut I gwine be doin' all dat time ter let yo' set up. I kin sleep enywhar' arter I git ter sleep. I don' know nuttin' twel day, nohow, 'ka'se I sleep all night in de cheer mos' es of'en es I dus in de baid. Heah, cum on." Henry took affairs in hand, carried Still's valise into the depot and secreted it, then they wandered out to get supper.

The agent at the station had gone when they returned, but Henry had a key, and the two entered together. The long hours of the night dragged heavily, and presently as if consciously guilty, Henry pulled forth a greasy pack of cards, and as if inviting some comment or converse concerning them, noisily slapped them together in his endeavor to attract the other's attention. He was not long in doing so.

"What do you play?" asked Still.

"Mos' enything. I ain' pertickler—poker, seben up, euchre, I don' keer which."

"Try poker, then," suggested Still.

Poker it was, at a cent ante; then five cents. Henry proved a good player, and easily held his own against him whom any one would at a glance have taken to be the better of the two.

It was late when Still lay down to rest, and Henry snoozed in the chair by the stove for the few remaining hours of the night. After breakfast Still found a means of traveling into the country in a wagon, so saying farewell to Henry, he promised to return again before long and win every cent he had, smiling as he said so.

"G'way, man, I ain' show'd yo' nuttin' yit. Jes' wait twel I play fer stakes, den I'll show yo' playin' dat is playin'."

"So long, then," said Still as he was driven off in the jolting, jostling wagon.

He was not quite sure where his destination would be, but he thought it unwise to go to Punch's home because of the enmity existing between the two young men. Then he thought that Mandy Jackson would likely furnish him board and lodging, since she was so hospitable that time he and Punch stopped there, and she had given them both as much persimmon beer as they wanted. So it was there that he went.

The old woman demurred at first, but finally consented to lodge him for the time he desired to stay. A few days had gone by before he had ingratiated himself into the good graces of the simple old woman, for he so enlivened her by his sprightly talk that she actually missed him when he went abroad. Still, in the meantime, found out that Jude had not returned, and that John Brooks was unaware of his rupture with his son, so that he received Still most cordially, and was glad to see him. John asked eagerly after his son, and inquired how Jude got on. To all of the inquiries he gave favorable replies by saying they were well, etc.

As for Still himself, he was provoked, and we

may say disappointed, because Jude had so successfully eluded him. After a few weeks' patient waiting he happened to see John one day, and the latter said:

"Mis' Lawson, my boy gwine be heah 'fo' long. I hyeard fum him tur'r day. He bin mighty low wid sumin' 'nur'r, an' ef hit hadn' er bin fer Jude dat mout er bin de lars un him, too. She wus de one dat writ de letter."

Still's face evidenced the most intense interest at this news as he quickly asked:

"Did she write to you that she was comin' with him?"

"Yass, I son't em de money tur'r day."

"I am glad to hear it. I didn't know your son had been sick."

When Punch had arrived with Jude, Still took especial care not to come to John's, and so avoided meeting him.

His object was Jude, and none other, for her treatment of him had aroused his mettle, and he had sworn a great and solemn oath that he would be revenged, and accordingly had set about his task with the assiduity and zeal of one bent upon her destruction. Jude returned to her place in the household of Mrs. Morton, and both were mutually content with the way affairs had turned out.

Jude had told briefly of her experience in the city, except the story of that terrible night, and not even Punch had heard that. She seemed overjoyed to be back again, and to use her own expression—

"I'se glad I wen' down dar jes' ter say I wen', but ef de good Lawd forgive me dis onest, I 'clar' 'fo' grashus hit gwine tek a fo'-horse team fer ter pull me dar ag'in."

We shall presently see that she again went to Richmond without any such forcible means being used, and that, too, without even being bidden.

Still persistently tried to obtain speech with Jude, but hearing he was in the neighborhood she avoided

him as if he had been the plague, and kept herself so closely confined in the house that it is a great wonder that it was not commented upon by Mrs. Morton.

Punch had sufficiently recovered to return to Richmond, and he was to leave the following day, and so had come to say good-by to Jude. It was an exceedingly awkward affair, that parting; and Punch could only stammer out some incoherent words about how much he thanked her for what she had done.

She bravely withheld her tears at seeing him go, until he was out of sight, then all her pent-up emotion swept like an avalanche over her, and tears flowed until her face seemed scorched. How devotedly she loved him! How she starved for a word that would prove his love for her! Ah, nobody knows, in fact never will know. He was gone now, probably never, never to return, and she cried again.

Jude put a shawl over her head and went out into the cool, crisp evening air, thinking to take a parting glimpse of the object of her adoration. 'She had walked to the gap at the lower end of the pasture, and was leaning on the fence, oblivious to her surroundings and the passage of time. Presently she heard a cracking sound, and looking up saw the most detestable sight she could think of. She was so taken by surprise that she gazed as if her sense of sight had deceived her. Then, suddenly remembering the indignity he had been guilty of heaping upon her, she cried hoarsely:

"Yo' dog, yo'!" and spat full in his face, then turned and fled precipitately toward the house. Still's hot blood suffused his face as he muttered a curse upon her whom he had determined upon as the next victim of his villainy. However, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face as if nothing unusual had happened.

Another time later he had called at Mr. Morton's,

and knocking at the kitchen door it had been opened by Jude. Immediately she recognized him, she had slammed it in his face.

This time Still disappeared for a few weeks, and re-appeared with no better success than before. Jude, at the last interview she had with him, and she made it very brief, said:

"Look heah, man, I hate yo' wuss'n I dus a highlan' moccasin, an' ef yo' keep er cumin' roun' heah I gwine set dem houn's on yo'! Dat's whut I gwine ter do," and she again shut the door in his face.

He resolved once more to effect a reconciliation that is, to try. He would give her a few days to permit her vixenish temper to cool, and he would attempt again. During the intervening time he would go over to Cloverdale and try his luck in a few games with Henry. So he went.

Henry had proved more than a match for the town-bred gambler upon more than one occasion, and consequently had won considerable money. The night upon which this whole history turns, Still and Henry had gone into the waiting-room to have an undisturbed and quiet game without fear of interruption, and to play for such odds as to make the game exciting, besides to decide once and for all which was the best player. The agent was busily engaged in the depot, so no playing was permissible there. The playing began, and the stakes were large, considering the fact that Henry was but a station-hand. They rose in amount as the night advanced, and by midnight Still was shorn of every dollar he possessed in ready cash, his watch and a few rings alone remaining his. Henry saw Still's hesitancy, and he said in a bantering way:

"Ante up, Mis' Lawson; ante up. Yo' ain' seed me play yit."

"Luck's against me to-night. I have lost all the money I have with me, but if you'll play for this

ring, here goes," and he flung a ring on the table before him.

"I don' keer whut yo' say play fer, I'm wid yo'; jes' es waal fer me ter put dat ring on my finger now, 'ka'se hits mine er'r'ady."

"Not if I know it!" exclaimed Still, with a voice changed in character, astounded at the fellow's assurance.

Henry looked at his companion. His face was overclouded and forbidding.

"Humph, I ain' said nuttin' fer yo' ter git mad erbout," he said.

"I didn't say you had," curtly replied the other; then added, "Play."

Henry won, and was in the act of slipping the ring on his finger, when Still, with a curse, cried:

"Stop! you thievin' scoundrel! Take those cards out of your sleeve! I thought it was something, I was losin' so steady."

Before he had hardly uttered the words, Henry was on his feet, glaring like a tiger at the other as he exclaimed in a voice changed and hoarse:

"Tek it back, yo' liar!"

For reply, Still threw his right hand behind him and drew his pistol, seeing which, Henry, ashen-pale with anger, shouted as he clutched a heavy ink-stand:

"Yo' cowardly dog!" and flung the heavy glass ink fount straight at Still's head. The pistol was discharged at the same moment, and Henry fell backward with a groan, while the ink-stand struck Still full in the mouth and broke off one of his teeth.

Seeing the probable fatal outcome of the quarrel, he made his exit quickly, leaving behind the smoking pistol on the table—and Henry moaning and groaning on the floor.

Still Lawson had not been out of the room ten minutes before he thought he recognized a figure going into the waiting-room. He did, and the figure was none other than Punch himself.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PUNCH IS FREED FROM HIS PREDICAMENT.

"Name of God, who's that been makin' all this mess on the floor," impatiently snapped Florence when she returned the day of Julia's discharge and found the floor littered with scraps of paper. Florence was a careful house-keeper, however careless she may have been concerning other affairs of more importance, and such provoked her.

"Ma, where is Julia?"

"How I know whar' Julia is, gal; dat young 'ooman allus trapesin' off sumwhar' 'nur'r. She lef' heah a li'l' while ergo, an' she ain' said when she wus cumin' back."

Without more ado she started to sweep up the scraps, but when she found them to be parts of a letter, her curiosity was excited, and she dropped the broom and picked them up. She was not long in fitting them together, and she did not hesitate to read the letter through, exclaiming impatiently as she finished:

"What a fool that boy Jim is! Keeps a runnin' after Julia, and she not carin' a cent for him except what she can get out of him. Well, he won't learn no sense, I don't care how much you talk to him, so let him learn for himself."

She arose and flung the fragments into an unused fire-place, and forgot about them until next day.

While Florence was getting supper, Julia returned. Florence noticed a look of fiendish

triumph in her eyes, and waited for her to unbosom her secret. So, exulting in her success, Julia could not long suppress the story of her discharge, the quarrel, and its sequel. Her manner seemed to invite inquiry, so at last Florence asked:

"Where have you been, Julia? You must have met with some good luck, judgin' from your face."

"Yes, you have guessed right first thing. You ought to have been here a little while ago if you wanted to hear something. Jim got on a high horse, and abused me for everything he could think of, and wound up by goin' away as mad as a hornet."

"Why, what did you do?"

She related the account of her misfortunes from beginning to end; in fact, she made a full confession of her iniquitous folly to Florence, and strange to say that young woman showed little emotion as Julia proceeded. When she had finished she was thoughtful a moment, then said:

"Julia, you are just like myself and the rest of the women. We trust these men too far, and now you have come to know what a fool you have been; but it is too late, too late!"

"Fool or no fool, I mean that this man shall marry me or I'll know the reason why. I have just come from a lawyer's office, where I have sworn out a warrant for Jim Brook's arrest; and while I dread the notoriety it will bring, it cannot be worse than people talkin' about me all the time."

Julia had reserved as much of the story of the wrongs perpetrated upon her as would be to her own undoing, and therefore Florence was beguiled into the belief that what she had told was the whole truth. None could doubt that Florence sympathized with Julia, but that was not surprising, because she had tasted the bitterness which Julia was experiencing. Still, she could not help feeling that Julia cared nothing for Jim, and thought only of saving herself, so she attempted argument.

"Why, Julia, what would you gain if you could

force Jim to marry you. He would leave you, and then you would be just where you are now. Besides, Jim has been away sick for weeks. Now how are you goin' to prove that he betrayed you? I don't see how you can."

"You just wait, and I'll show you. But, Florence, what in the world are you tryin' to shield these rascally men for? The Lord knows you were treated badly enough, and yet you try to shield Jim in his rascality, while you know how Still Lawson treated me."

"I'm not tryin' to shield anybody. I'm just bringin' the facts before you. If you have Jim Brooks up in court you will have to prove he promised to marry you, and besides, other things in the bargain. So you had better think before you go on with this any further."

"Yes, stop here like a fool and let Jim go his way. And I, what will become of me, I should like to know? No, just because he has refused to marry me, I intend that he shall not marry anybody else as long as I can help it. So you are just wastin' breath on me, Florence. Jim is by this time in the station-house unless he can find somebody to go on with his bail, and I hope to God he can't."

"Have your own way, old lady, you think you know best; but if the case goes against you, where will you be?"

"Certainly no worse off than before, except perhaps for a little notoriety."

"Come, eat your supper. When does your case come off?"

"To-morrow mornin', in the police court."

"Have you got any witnesses—"

Just then a knock at the door interrupted her. Upon answering it, Florence found a deputy with a formal summons to appear in the police court on the following day.

"Well, Julia, if this don't beat all I ever heard or saw. What do you think I know about you, or Jim

either, that you are goin' to drag me into this mess? I just won't go."

"Then you might go to jail for contempt."

"Humph, you talk mighty full of assurance, just like I had to go. I'm mighty afraid when you all get me there you'll want to let me go mighty quick."

When the hour for holding court came, Julia and Florence had found places in the same crowded court-room where poor Jude had undergone such tortures of mind. Punch was seated near his lawyer, and while he could not help but show some evidence of nervousness, he looked on with curious interest at such novel proceedings, for never had he been so unfortunate as to figure in a court trial before.

The justice rapped for order, and the room was silent in a moment.

After the hearing of some minor cases, Punch's case was called.

Julia's case was briefly stated by her attorney, and in a few brief sentences he asked that simple justice be done his client, and that the court oblige the defendant to marry her as somewhat of a reparation for the wrong he had done her. This was all the client asked.

The justice then, in stentorian tones, asked Punch if he would marry Julia.

"No, sir, your Honor."

"What! You do this young woman this wrong and then not want to marry her. I'll see you marry her this very hour, or I'll see you go to the grand jury, and you know that means the penitentiary for a term of years."

"I'm not guilty, your Honor."

"Well, you must prove it," snapped the justice.

Julia's lawyer was on his feet in a moment, and said:

"We have abundant proof, your Honor, that this young man,"—nodding toward Punch—"promised

to marry the young woman. Here, for instance, is this letter, written but a few weeks ago, in which he uses the most ardent language urging the plaintiff to marry him; but later, when he found the mischief that had been done, he refused."

"It's a—" began Punch, bouncing to his feet in a rage. His eyes were blazing and fierce, and he looked like a mad beast.

His lawyer pulled him into his seat, and said a few words to him, and he grew quieter. The justice did not notice the interruption. When the lawyer read the letter, which, by the way, was filled with some of the most absurd extravagances, a titter ran through the court, and even the justice smiled.

For a brief moment Punch was puzzled as to where the letter came from, then he suddenly remembered writing it nearly a twelve-month before, and he so informed his counsel. As soon as the opposing lawyer had ceased reading, Punch's counsel asked the gentleman of the opposition if he minded reading the date of the letter.

"Certainly not," was the reply. But no date was there.

"The street address then." Still none there.

"The post-mark on the envelope; when was that imprinted, if you please?"

The place and date were given.

"Thank you very much. Now, may it please your Honor to continue this case for a few days, that we may make a little preparation for the defense."

"I'll send the case to the grand jury," was the reply.

"I don't ask that, because, if it pleases your Honor, I think the case can be decided here within a day or two."

"The case is continued. Summon the witnesses for Friday. Will that be long enough?"

The attorney nodded.

Punch was taken back to jail, while the witnesses went their several ways.

As Florence passed the cell in which Punch was locked, she managed to speak to him.

"I tell you what, Jim, I don't believe that letter the lawyer read was the one you wrote last."

"Why, what makes you think so?"

"Because I saw a letter of yours yesterday that had been torn up, I think, by Julia."

"You did? What did you do with it? For God's sake, Florence, I know you are on Julia's side, but if you ever did think anything of me, and I believe you do even now, get me that letter! Unless you do I'll surely be sent to the penitentiary, for I'll never marry that woman, I don't care what they do with me."

"But I flung the scraps away, and suppose I can't find 'em. What must I do?" asked Florence.

"Look everywhere, and when you find them, take the pieces right straigt to my lawyer, and for gracious' sake don't let Julia see 'em. His name is Mr. Jackson, No. — Eleventh Street. For God's sake get that letter, Florence, and you'll never be sorry for it as long as you live." Florence was so long that Julia was impatiently pacing about in the corridor waiting for her, and her temper was threadbare when she made her appearance.

"In the name of goodness, what have you been doin' all this time, Florence? Here I've been waitin' for you the longest time. Where have you been?"

"Talkin' to Jim a little while."

"Eh, heh. You must have been promisin' to be a witness for him, I suppose?" sneered Julia.

"No, I didn't promise to be nothin', but he asked me to attend to some business for him, and I promised to do that."

"What business? Yes, Florence, you are deceivin' me. I know what it is. You have gone against me, Florence, when you know I trusted you most. You deceitful hussy, you!"

"Look here, Julia, I won't listen to a word more

you have got to say, but I'll box your ears if you don't shut up. You've got to mind how you use your tongue around me now, I tell you. I want you to remember this, that you are as much to blame, and more so, than Still Lawson, for I've been all along there, and now you want to make Jim Broo's bear another's fault. I see this is not fair, and while I am not goin' to testify in court against you, I'll tell you now, as I told you before, that I've got enough sins to answer for already, God in heaven knows, without addin' any more to 'em. That's the way with young girls. They listen to fair promises from men and believe every blessed thing they say. Presently they find out everything they've got is gone, and they ain't got nothin' but a promise, and a broken one at that. I've seen for years what a fool I've been, but it's mighty little use tellin' young folks, they've just got to learn, and sometimes their learnin' costs a big price. So, Julia, the best thing I think for you to do is to take the trouble of yours for your share. Go on, do like I've done, and let Jim alone. I believe I would rather go through any disgrace than force a man to marry me."

"I'll die before I let him go, I've got him so now. And I see the justice is on my side, because you could tell that from the way he spoke to Jim. I thought he was goin' to take his head off when he jumped on him at one time this mornin'. But I don't believe Jim was as much excited as I was. I know I could hardly hold myself still."

Immediately upon getting home, Florence, without the knowledge of Julia, found and secured the scraps of paper she had thrown in the fire-place the day before, and during the day found an opportunity to place them in the hands of Punch's counsel in person.

He was, of course, glad to secure such evidence in his client's favor, and he tried his utmost to get Florence to commit herself sufficiently to be called as a witness, but she was too wary.

When Friday morning came the case was again called, and the lawyer for the defense signified his readiness to go on with it. The letter that had been read in court was again read, and then Florence was called. She told in a fearless way of both Still Lawson's visits and of the cessation of Punch's during the former's attentions, and a renewal of them on the part of the latter during the last few weeks. She also told of the sudden and wholly unaccountable disappearance of Still, but nothing would induce her to utter a word defamatory of Julia's character. She cleverly evaded questions of this nature, and in doing so perjured herself a number of times, but let us hope that she did so with the belief that she did a charitable act toward the sinning girl.

When the plaintiff's side was rested, Punch's lawyer proceeded to read the letter which ought to have been in the envelope in the hands of the plaintiff, instead of the one written months before. Proof sufficiently strong was introduced by this fact alone to establish an intention of fraud on the part of Julia. So, after the examination of one or two other witnesses to further establish Punch's innocence of the grave charge, the lawyer paused, and looked up at the justice, as if mutely inquiring whether she should go on.

"That will do, Mr. Jackson. Look here, Julia White, I have a good mind to send you to jail for attempting to force this man to marry you. I don't believe you have got any shame in you. You bring the man here, if you know who he is, that wronged you, and I'll make him marry you. The case is dismissed. That will do, court is adjourned."

Of crestfallen and desperate women, Julia seemed the worst. So, sobbing bitterly, she left the court-room, accompanied by Florence. Her tears were of anger, and shame, and disappointment, for now every hope that she formerly held was gone, and henceforth she was an outcast. Julia's education,

her former environment, and the preponderance of the white race in her made the shame more bitterly felt.

Florence pitied her as only one Magdalene can another, for it is an unaccountable fact that the exceeding virtuous are pharisaical to the degree that none of the unlucky ones who have stepped aside escape that ostracism that is a part of our civilization.

When they had reached Florence's home, they had a long talk concerning Julia's plans for the future. Indeed, Julia had none, so it devolved upon Florence to elaborate whatever was necessary, for Julia did little else the remainder of the day other than brood over her misfortune.

Florence first began by asking:

"Julia, where do you reckon Jim's lawyer got that letter from that Jim wrote you?"

"I don't know. They, that is he, must have found it in the ash-barrel. I was a big fool for not burnin' it up."

"No he didn't, either. I gave him that letter myself, for you left it in the room, and I saved the pieces."

"Well, you wretch! I am a good mind to knock you down with this poker. Florence, you have lied to me like a dog. Do you hear, you villainous hussy! I wouldn't stay here another minute to save your life." And Julia caught up the fire iron, as if proposing to execute her threat, but Florence calmly said:

"No, you won't do that, either. I did what I thought would be best for you."

"Best for me! You needn't trouble yourself. I think I know what is best."

"You didn't a few months ago, at any rate."

"Stop! Florence, another word, and I'll hit you as hard as the Lord will let me!"

"Now listen, Julia," continued the imperturbable young woman, who had preserved an even temper,

despite provocation, "I promised you that I wouldn't testify against you, didn't I?"

"Yes," admitted Julia.

"But I didn't promise that I would see Jim entrapped when you knew that he was innocent, did I?"

"No," again admitted Julia.

"Then why do you quarrel with me, and call me a liar, and other bad names?"

"I know, Florence, you and I are very different; you can bear your wrongs with patience, but I am hot-tempered. I was mad at the way Still treated me, and if I married Jim I thought everything would be all right. But when he found out, he hated me so, Florence, and cursed me like I was a brute; but I knew he loved me, Florence, and if I hadn't have been such a fool I might have been his wife now instead of a—well, never mind, I'll never be a wife, that is certain. I am so miserable, miserable, Florence! God knows I am. So forgive me for what I said just now. I didn't know what I was doin' I was mad, I was crazy!"

Julia had dropped on her knees by Florence, who was seated, and like a sorrowful penitent at the feet of the Virgin, was crying. Florence softly stroked those snake-like tresses, and spoke words of soothing comfort to the poor wretch there, and before long Julia had forgotten her sorrows in a tearful sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISFORTUNE STILL PURSUES PUNCH.

By one of those unlucky coincidences that seem traps set for the unfortunate, Punch had heard the report of the pistol and had gone in the direction from which the sound proceeded. As he neared the waiting-room he saw in the light streaming through the door the figure of a man. An instant more and he was gone in the darkness. Feeling certain that something unusual had happened, he ran hastily into the room, and found the person of poor Henry stretched upon the floor. When Punch reached him he was nearly gone. He had lost a quantity of blood, and was faint, although not a drop showed upon his clothing.

Punch saw at a glance the gleaming pistol on the table, but did not stop to examine it. What a pity he overlooked this important fact, for had he done so how much suffering, anxiety, and suspense would he probably have spared himself and others in doing so.

"Hi, ain't that you, Henry? Name of God, man! what is the matter with you? Can't you say something?"

Punch saw his lips moving, and bent over to hear what he said, and heard the whispered word:

"Shot."

"Where? Where, boy?"

For reply Henry put his hand on his chest. With the rapidity of one in desperation Punch tore

open the poor fellow's shirt, and then saw the innocent-looking wound.

"Who did it? Who was it that shot you, Henry? Hurry up and tell me, old man; you won't be here long."

Again Punch bent himself to catch the faintest sound, but while the wounded man's lips moved, no sound was audible.

Now it so chanced that the outgoing train from Richmond took the siding at Cloverdale to permit the ingoing train to pass. None of the station employees were expected to meet the former train, because it was scheduled not to stop. The train from Richmond stopped a considerable way from the station, so Punch, being awake at the time, concluded to walk to the station, which he accordingly did.

The ingoing train did stop at Cloverdale, and while Punch was endeavoring to secure an antemortem statement from the unfortunate Henry, the loud shrieking of its reverberating whistle resounded through the woods like a wild creature. Punch paid no attention to it, but when the train drew up at the station he was seen bending over the prostrate body of Henry, who was now dead, and saying as he held the victim's hand: "Where'd you get that ring, Henry?" Whether it was the stern tone in which Punch asked this question, or whether it was a misconstruction placed upon by the witnesses who appeared at this juncture, it is not known, but sufficient had been observed to incriminate Punch, although he was unaware that anybody could even suspect him of so heinous an act.

Punch arose from his knees on the appearance of others in the room. Being seen alone with the dead young man made him appear rather awkward. However, he presently found his tongue sufficiently to reply to some one in the gaping and curious

crowd, now huddled into the room, that had asked who committed the killing, by saying:

"I don't know any more than any of you do. I saw a man open the door and quickly run away just as I came up, but I did not recognize him because it was too dark. I have just come here on the train that's on the sidin' from Richmond."

This seemed to satisfy many of the spectators, who had clambered off the train for the express purpose of gazing upon the gruesome spectacle, and they scurried aboard again as the train pulled out, apparently contented. A few minutes more and both trains had departed, leaving the little village in almost total darkness, except here and there a spark flitting about hither and thither in the gloom, which upon closer view proved to be lanterns carried by messengers who were dispatched to do various offices. One was sent for the constable, another for Dr. Bailey, while some made a futile search for the murderer.

It was not long before everybody in the place knew that the villainous deed had been done to the good-natured, faithful, and generous fellow, that was a favorite with everybody because he was never in other than a good humor, and seemed to delight in every day that he lived.

By the time Dr. Bailey arrived, the body of Henry had stiffened where it lay. A kindly-disposed person had flung over it the overcoat of the unfortunate man, which was found on a chair. When the doctor had seen the remains he was in no good humor, because he had been aroused out of bed and had ridden a considerable distance simply to view a dead body. And no wonder he was exasperated.

Upon the arrival of the county officer, charge was taken of the body and all the circumstances regarding the tragedy were taken into account.

The pistol, which had been looked upon with curiosity by everybody that came in, and touched

by none, still lay upon the table in full view. To many it seemed to possess some superstitious horror, owing to the fact that it had been an agency in the destruction of a human being. However, the officer promptly confiscated it, without any qualms whatever, and thrust it into his pocket. He then proceeded about other business.

After the inquest had been held, and witnesses examined, the jury came to the verdict "That the deceased came to his death at the hand of a person or persons unknown." Henry's remains were then delivered over to his kin for burial.

Then conjecture as to who could have been the murderer became the talk of the store, the barroom, and on the farm.

When the constable arrived at home he threw off his overcoat, and forgot the pistol that still remained in one of the pockets, nor did he think of it until the following day, when, having occasion to ride again to Cloverdale, he felt the unusual weight in the pocket, and wondering at it, found it to be the pistol he had himself placed there. While waiting for his horse he minutely examined the weapon, and at last his eye caught the words, cut deeply in the handle with some sharp instrument, "*James Brooks.*"

With an exclamation of satisfaction at so quickly having found a clue to the murder, he replaced the pistol in his pocket, secured a warrant, and was soon at Cloverdale. Upon inquiry, he found that James Brooks had been there that morning, but had gone away somewhere. It was simple enough to find where he had probably gone, so he went over to Mr. Morton's and found him at his father's.

Never before in the history of the Morton family had an officer of the law come on the place for the purpose of making an arrest, and naturally such a procedure was most novel, as well as painful, to all concerned, and especially to Punch.

When the officer rode up, Punch was in the

inidst of telling of the awful tragedy, while his auditors stood listening with awe, and everybody gave a visible start when the constable gave a halloo in the yard without.

Jude had heard of Punch's arrival, and was present also. Our hero himself went to see what was wanted, followed closely by the whole household.

"Where does John Brooks live?" asked the officer.

"This is his house," replied Punch.

"And you are Jim Brooks?" inquired the constable.

"Yes, that's what I'm sometimes called," was the reply.

"Well, I don't think I'll go any further then. I've got a warrant for your arrest. Now come, cross your hands, and—"

Here the man of the law drew out of his pocket the warrant, and a stout piece of cord with which to bind the hands of the prisoner, but was interrupted by a defiant scream from Jude, as with the swiftness of a hawk she threw herself between her lover and the officer, with her eyes blazing with indignation at such meditated treatment.

"Yo' jes' tetch him, yo', low-lifted po' white trash, an' I'll knock yo' in de haid jes' es sho' es Gawd gimme de strenk!"

"Here, put that rock down, you fool, unless you want to go with him. I only came for Jim Brooks, but the jail will accommodate more, and I'll land you there so quick it'll make your head swim, unless you behave yourself," said the officer.

The excitement soon sent up a wail from the children, from the eldest down; not so much out of sympathy for Punch, but the sorrow seemed epidemic. Only Elvira seemed unmoved the whole time; in fact, she appeared to gloat with utmost satisfaction upon the prisoner, whom she had never come to like.

"Now, you had just as well come along, Jim, because if you resist it will be the worst for you."

"But you haven't told me yet what I'm accused of."

"Well, you are charged in the warrant with killing one Henry—What's-his-name?"

"It's a mistake! It's a lie! I don't know anything about it."

"Well, suppose you prove to the satisfaction of the court that you didn't; tellin' me won't do any good. Come, get ready. I haven't got any time to waste, and the ride is a long one to the court-house."

Punch's hands were securely tied, and he was made to walk in the road before his guard. As they left, Punch said good-by to each, not even omitting Elvira this time; but when it came to Jude's turn, the passionate kiss, mingled with tears, that she impressed upon Punch's lips, made even the stern officer turn away his head for very pity.

For a while Jude seemed powerless to think, much less to do anything, for the suddenness with which this, the greatest of all her trials, was thrust upon her so overcame the poor girl that for several minutes after the constable's departure with Punch she alternately sat dejectedly in the doorway, or walked back and forth before the cabin with the restlessness of an imprisoned bear.

"Name er Gawd, Jude, yo' mus' ain' got good sense ter keep rippin' up an' down de yard, lek dat wus gwine do eny good. Yo' better cum in de house 'fo' yo' ketch yo' de'th er cole," said Joe.

Jude continued the restless pacing back and forth, now and then emitting a low wail of distress, which was probably a relic of barbarism; but no spoken language would have expressed the agony one-half so well as that plaintive cry. Without appearing to notice Elvira or the children, Jude after awhile grew calmer, and then went to the Morton's home to convey the sad news of

Punch's arrest. As she rushed into the room, almost breathless, she exclaimed in an agitated voice:

"Mis' Marg'ret whut yo' reck'n dey dun dun. De constable dun cum an' took Punch erway ter de cote-house, an' say he is 'cused er killin' Henry. I know hits a lie, Mis' Marg'ret. I jes' know sum'-body else dun hit, an' den lay hit on Punch 'ka'se he wus at Clov'dale dat night."

Mrs. Morton seemed inexpressibly moved by the grief of the poor girl, and showed it plainly, yet she tried to comfort her. Her comforting assurances that Punch would prove himself innocent so kindled the dying hope in the bosom of Jude that she convulsively seized the hands of her mistress and covered them with tears and kisses, smiling the while, which indeed was a queer mingling of the emotions; but nobody knows the delightful sense of comfort that assurances from the lips we can and do believe have upon those in great distress, except those who have experienced such.

"Dus yo' think so sho' 'nuff, Mis' Marg'ret, er is yo' jes' sayin' dat jes' so?"

"No, I mean what I say, Jude. If Punch is innocent of this horrible crime I have no doubt but that he will be able to prove it. So you just rest content to wait and see."

"Thank Gawd fer dat, Mis' Marg'ret; dat's jes' whut I gwine do."

"Now, Jude, tell me why it is you seem to be so much interested in Punch here lately. I never heard anything about all this several months ago."

"Dar, now, yo' jes' go 'way, Mis' Marg'ret," coyly replied Jude, hanging her head bashfully. She might have sent anybody else straightway about his business had such an impertinent question been asked, but the questioner was Mrs. Morton, and she did not know how to evade her questions, so she looked up appealingly into the eyes of her questioner. Her handsome eyes welled over with tears and her lips quivered, but she said nothing,

only sank into a chair and buried her face in her apron.

"I know now. You love him, don't you, Jude?"
"Now, ef dat ain' de truf! But I 'clar' 'fo' Gawd I ain' said a wu'd 'bout hit. How yo' know dat so good, Mis' Marg'ret?"

Humph, I was young myself once. But I thought you had forgotten about Punch that time you went to Richmond, soon after a young man by the name of—"

"Debble!" broke forth Jude, who at the mere thought of his name was aflame with anger. "I know who yo' mean, an' dat's dat lowlif'ted Still Lawson. I wus er fool den, but now dat man I hates wuss'n I dus pizen; an' I b'lieves, jes' es sho es I is settin' heah, dat ef dat lowlif'ted dog bit you 'twould be wuss'n er mad dog bite."

Jude related to Mrs. Morton, under bond of secrecy, the adventure while in Richmond; and as she went on with the narrative Still's deep-dyed perfidy was scarcely believed by Margaret Morton until when the climax was reached, and Jude told of having flung him through the window, Mrs. Morton clapped her hands together, exclaiming:

"Good, good! I didn't think it of you. It served the villain just right. I don't wonder you hate him. Now, what has become of this brazen scoundrel, Jude?"

"I seed him on dis place a few days ergo, an' hit would er dun yo' good fer ter see me slam de do' in he face."

"What! has that brute got the heart to come here after you? How glad I should have been to have known your story sooner. I would have set the hounds on the reprobate."

"Yass'm, I wish so, too, but whut good dat gwine do now? Jes' wishin', Gawd knows I wish I could do sumin' fer ter free Punch, but whut kin I do? I ain' got 'nuff sense ter know which way ter turn. An' I'se jes' standin' heah doin' nuttin' an' Punch

gwine ter d'struction jes' es fas' es de law 'low.
Whut kin I do, Mis' Marg'ret? Ef yo' don' tell
sumin,' I gwine ter run 'stracted, 'ka'se I'se mos'
dat now."

"Jude, my poor child, be patient. Punch will certainly come to no harm until his trial, and that will be—I forget, I can't keep court-days in my head—well, when court-day comes. I will ask Flournoy. I am sorry for you, Jude; but as I told you before, I am sure Punch will be sufficiently able to prove himself innocent, and then you will have him back again."

There was a fleeting brightness in her countenance, that was as fugitive as it was sudden. She looked frankly into Mrs. Morton's face when she said:

"Yo' sho' is good ter me, Mis' Marg'ret, 'ka'se I 'spec' ef yo' hadn' er talked ter me lek yo' did, I would er followed dat man spang ter jail, dat I would. I know jes' es well es I'se stan'in' heah dat Punch ain' killed Henry. 'Ka'se I know dat boy lek er book. I know he right mean sum'times, but den he ain' lowlif'ted. I ain' nuver seen him, er hyearn un him nur'r, doin' er real low-down mean trick, an' I ain' gwine b'lieve hit, nur'r, twel I see hit wid my own eyes."

With this Jude retired to her sanctum, the kitchen, where she did her duties with an aching heart, and in her solitude tears flowed freely.

About the station at the time of the tragedy the darkness was intense, favoring to the utmost the attempt on the part of the murderer to escape. Silence, save for the throbbing of the engine far down the track, was as intense as the blackness. As Still made his exit from the waiting-room he secreted himself behind a pile of ties, to ascertain if possible whether the shot had proved fatal. Scarcely had he concealed himself when whom should he see enter the light of the doorway but Jim Brooks.

Still could have uttered a cry of exultation at what he supposed his good fortune. He well enough remembered the name that had been crudely scratched on the butt of the pistol, and of its whereabouts, but he felt in his pocket to be quite sure. A sense of security now took possession of him, and after remaining where he was until both trains had gone, he had the audacity to walk forth and actually commingle with the curious crowd in the room after he was quite sure that Henry was dead.

It is one of the fortunate things for the good of society that murderers frequently, in attempting or in committing a crime, overlook some detail, or in the full sense of security become too confident, and before they are aware the mighty law has the culprit.

So it happened with Still ; but we anticipate.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TRIAL.

The day of the trial came at last, but to those to whom it meant so much it seemed very long in coming. It was on Monday that the court was held. One of those balmy days in early spring, when the world and everything living in it appears to become rejuvenated and rejoice in the renewal of youth. Of all days in the year it seemed least suited to the business in hand; but to those whom days of weary waiting and uncertain suspense had reduced to depths of misery unknown before, it was a day of deliverance.

Punch had long ago employed a lawyer to defend his cause, and had told him everything concerning the crime of which he was cognizant. He was told to plead "not guilty" to the indictment, and other advice was given him that might prove useful during the trial.

When court was opened the stifling, stuffy little room was filled with interested spectators, until there was scarcely room for another to stand. The judge, in all his sober and unruffled dignity, sat stolidly and idly looking down upon the motley crowd before him from the high perch custom has seen fit to place him upon. With a noisy rap of the gavel he hushed the hum of voices and declared court to be open.

Punch, safely handcuffed, was brought in and seated beside his counsel, and as the boy recog-

nized his parent, and other friends of his youth, two great tears were to be seen in his eyes, which he furtively wiped away. His face was ashy, because he knew of the seriousness of the charge against him. He presently stood up to be sworn, and then the usual form of questioning concerning name, age, occupation, etc., was gone through with.

Then the judge asked the formal question:

"James Brooks, are you guilty, or not guilty, of the crime as charged in the indictment?"

Silence reigned over the whole court as Punch, in a voice free of even a tremor, replied:

"Not guilty."

The judge then nodded to the Commonwealth's attorney to proceed. This gentleman, in a terse and plain way, stated the facts to the jury, and related Punch's supposed connection with the crime, which it is not necessary to give here; then witnesses were introduced to substantiate the charge against the prisoner.

Unluckily Punch had admitted to the constable, when taken, that the pistol once belonged to him, but that he had pawned it when in destitute circumstances, and had not seen it since. This that officer testified to, which Punch did not deny.

"Now as to the ring you were quarreling about, after Henry had become too weak to speak?" asked the lawyer for the prosecution, when it came to Punch's turn to be examined.

Punch gave a glance about the court-room until his eyes found Jude, and a look of reproach from him, that was undeserved, was centered upon her, and he answered:

"That ring once belonged to my mother. She gave it to me, and I thought it was in other hands when I found it on poor Henry's finger. God knows I didn't have nothin' against the boy in the world. I might have spoken roughly to Henry, but I didn't mean it."

"That might be. And you could have killed him, without meaning to do it, in a mad fit over a game of poker."

A desperate effort was made by Punch's lawyer to prove an alibi, but nobody that Punch knew was on the train that night, nor did he say before leaving Richmond what train he would take. Consequently this was out of the question. The defense fought every inch of the ground with desperation, but the case went to the jury after a two days' fight that was the delight of those who enjoy the argument of a case the outcome of which means the life or death of a human being.

The jury was out but a short time. Whether it was the prejudice against Punch because evidence had established the fact that he was shiftless, and a city-bred gambler who had trailed his iniquity into the country and destroyed without provocation, as far as they knew, a promising young man who happened to be the winner in this instance; or whether it was a desire to rid the community of what they considered a deep-dyed scoundrel, is not known—but, at any rate, each juryman came in quietly and took his seat in the jury-box. Not a sound save the ticking of the old clock was to be heard. Everybody waited with eager and tense anxiety to hear the verdict, and as the last juryman was seated the judge asked:

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you decided upon a verdict?"

The stillness was oppressive as the foreman replied:

"We have, your Honor; and we, the jury, find the prisoner guilty of murder in the first degree."

A few seconds elapsed before the judge arose, during which time conflicting emotions disturbed the peace of the prisoner. He felt horrified to think that he was to be executed for a crime of which he was innocent, and that because he could not prove himself so; which of course he was

powerless to do. When he looked up he saw his father and Joe crying. Suddenly, and with the swiftness of thought, the enormity of the crime appalled him. It tortured him to think what a son he had been to his father, for he was quite sure they loved him, while he had only brought the deepest disgrace upon these innocent people by his actions. Had he not established a reputation for card-playing, and this was the outcome of it. He indeed felt that it would have been a boon to himself, and his kindred as well, could the ground have opened and swallowed him. He was thinking, and how swift do our thoughts flit from one thing to another, that the world was already closed to him, and in a few more days he would be forever and forever unmindful of the joys of living, and of being loved. Ah well, what difference did it make! His lawyer aroused him from his moody silence by a touch on the arm. Punch became alert, and arose as the judge commanded

“Prisoner at the bar, stand up!”

Then, amid the deep and mournful silence of the court, the judge began in a voice that trembled with emotion :

“James Brooks, you have had a fair trial by a jury of twelve respectable citizens. The evidence is against you, and while you have been ably defended, a verdict is found charging you with the wilful and unprovoked murder of Henry Baker. It only remains for me, as an administrator of the laws, to pronounce sentence upon you. Let this be a warning to all evil doers. In the name of the law, I command that you, James Brooks, shall be punished for the murder of Henry Baker by being hanged by the neck until you be dead. And may the Lord have mercy on your soul.”

Immediately after these words were pronounced, Punch was returned to the jail, where a close watch was set till the day of execution should come. Effort to secure a new trial was made by Punch's

attorney, and he gave Punch every hope that it would be secured. However, he saw only too plainly, that unless new evidence could be secured that it would be an additional expense to the county for nothing.

At the first opportunity Jude was admitted to see the condemned man, and for a time she was speechless when in his presence, because the meeting was most painful to both.

Punch was in an ill humor in the bargain, and the fact that Jude had permitted the ring to get out of her possession after such a sacred promise provoked him to it. She began to say something, but Punch broke forth passionately

"Shut up, Jude! You just answer me one question, and then you can go."

Jude patiently waited for him to proceed.

"Answer me this: Where did Henry get that ring I gave you?"

"Humph, I dunno whar' he got hit. I know I ain' gin hit ter him."

"When did you have it last?"

"I don' know jes' adzackly when dat wus, but t'wus once when Still Lawson wus heah, an' he wus tellin' me 'bout yo', an' dat made me es mad es fyer, so I flung dat ole ring erway jes' lek hit had been er hot tater. An' he jes' picked hit up an' slip'd hit on he finger. Now dat is all I knows 'bout dat ring ef I wus gwine die dis ve'y minit."

Punch could not recollect what he had done in particular that had aroused the little woman's jealousy, nor did he think long about it. While he was silent, Jude's curiosity concerning the pistol was provoked as to how it got to Cloverdale unless Punch brought it. She had seen it the day of the trial for the first time. So she asked:

"Whar' did dat pistol cum fum dat dey had? Dat's whut I'd lek ter know. I ain' nuver seed yo' wid hit, an' I heah folks sayin' seein' is b'lievin'."

"The pistol was mine, but I got mighty hard up one day and I pawned it in a store down on Main Street in Richmond. I don't know the name of the man that kept the store; in fact, I gave the man a false name, and I don't know what the name was now. These facts I am unable to prove because I am shut up here, and I don't know who to trust. I know my lawyer won't go to all that trouble and expense, because he is takin' my case without gettin' a cent paid down, and I just know he won't go to Richmond on a wild goose chase. I've told him all about pawnin' the pistol, and when he asked me for the pawn ticket I felt like a fool, 'cause I've gone and lost it."

Jude had fully made up her mind what she would do concerning Punch's affair, and with a face with yet some hopefulness in it, she waited for him to further confide in her.

"You say when you flung that ring away that Still Lawson was up here, and you saw him pick it up and put it on his finger?"

"Yass, dat's jes' whut he dun."

"When was that?"

"Dat's been er long time ergo."

"How long?"

"Bout fo' munts."

"Now that's what beats me. How Henry could get that ring, and Still Lawson gone the devil knows where for two or three months, is more than I can see through."

"Still Lawson ain' gone nowhar'. I seed him tur'r day, an' mo'n dat, he look lek he ain' gwine 'way fum up heah no mo'."

"What! Jude, have you seen Still Lawson? And you haven't told me? Well, you little fool! Here I've wanted to know that the worst in the world, and you keep your mouth shut about the only thing that I did want to hear. Where is he now?"

"Humph, ef dat de way yo' gwine ca'y on, I ain'

gwine tell yo' nuttin'. In de fus' place, I ain' no fool, an' ef I wus, I mout be sumwhar' else 'sides stayin' here. Yass, I know whar Still is. I jes' know de pizenous devil been er hangin' roun' home fer Gawd knows how long, twel I'se sick er de sight un him. But I lay er ni'pence I kin fin' him 'fo' night ef I wan'ter."

"That's all right then," said Punch, a faint smile appearing on his face for the first time in a week or more.

"Now, Jude, you go and get me a sheet of paper, an envelope, stamp, and a pencil. Here's the money. No, stop! I'll be blamed if I do. She tried her best to ruin me by her lies, now let her bear the burden of her own heady doin's. I won't have nothin' to do with her."

"Why, whut in de name er Gawd is yo' talkin' erbout, Punch? Is yo' gwine crazy? Fus' yo' tell me ter do sumin', den you' call me back an' talk erbout sum'body I ain' nuver hyeard un. Whut marter'd yo' enyhow, boy?"

"Jude, listen. I've been a fool, and I've been entrapped by a villain, a woman; but a devil, if she is."

"Humph, I know'd dat all de time! but I didn't wan'ter hu't yo' feelin's by saying' so, jes lek yo' did me jes' now."

"I know, Jude, you have been mighty good to me," and Punch's voice softened to tenderness. "I have treated you badly for all you have endured for me, but I'll tell you, because I want you to know before I am gone why I appeared to neglect and forget you when I went to town. Jude, there is a woman there that I became acquainted with named Julia White. She is so pretty, Jude; her face is almost white, and her hair is as straight as Mrs. Morton's. I began to go with her, and she made so much of me that I became distracted over the woman. I got into two or three fights on her account, and afterwards she seemed to think more

of me than ever. I took her everywhere—to the theater, church, parties, balls, on excursions, and I don't know what all. I spent everything I made on this witch of a woman, and I would have spent more if I had had it. This continued until I asked her to marry me; she told me that she was not ready to marry, and soon after that we quarreled because I found she was meetin' Still when she thought I didn't know it. Well, she went her way and I went mine. Still took my place, and I went to the dogs as fast as bad liquor and gamblin' could take me. But that man Still is as sharp as a briar, if he is the blackest rascal in the world. Julia couldn't get away with him, for he was wary enough to hold himself in and not look like he was disturbed about her. Stingy! that man didn't show her half the good time I did, for I heard about it afterwards, still she looked like she was goin' crazy about him. Well, I found out after I left here that Still had suddenly left town and was gone nobody knew where. The very mornin' after gettin' to Richmond I got a note from Julia."

Here Jude's face was a study as she listened to the man she loved tell of his passion for this woman who was nothing to him, while she, like a starving creature, longed for those endearing words she had heard him speak so long ago. Indeed, hers was a piteous look. Now she was hopeless of ever bringing him to love her as before.

Punch continued without seeming to notice this appealing look from Jude.

"When I went to Florence Banks, where she was stayin', you would have thought she had found a new sweetheart, the way she treated me. Well, I fell into the trap like a blind mule, and after that she could not do enough for me."

Then Punch told Jude of his arrest at Julia's instigation, and of his trial and acquittal, which brought the events of his life up to the time he left Richmond.

After Punch had finished his narrative, Jude looked up. Tears stood in her soft eyes, but she flung them away, and asked with a firmer voice than could have been expected:

"Humph, I reck'n dat broke yo' er suckin' aiggs, didn't hit? Punch, yo'se er bigger fool dan I uver thought enybody could be. But den eny man I uver did see gits crazy when er 'ooman looks at him sorter hard. Whar' is dat gal now, den?" she asked.

"She's down there with Florence, I reckon; . . . don't care where she is."

"Whar' dus Florence live at?"

"I don't know what you want to know all that for, but she lives in the alley between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets, near Marshall."

"Now dat's ernuff 'bout dat nigger. Le's see ef we cyarn' fin' sum way er nur'r ter git yo' out fum 'hin' dem bars. When did yo' lef' Richmon', yo' say?"

Punch told her.

"Now whar' did yo' put dat pawn ticket dat de man gin yo' fer dat pistol?"

"God knows. I got so drunk that night that I expect I flung it away."

"Is hit at home; dat is, Unc' Johns?"

"No, for I have had every rag searched, from upstairs down."

"Whar' is de ring, den, dat yo' say Henry had on his finger?"

"The constable has that."

"Den yo' look lek yo' ain' got nuttin' fer ter sho' 'twarn' yo' dat kilt Henry?"

"It's no use to keep on askin' that, Jude," said Punch, wincing like a goaded animal. "I see as plain as the nose on a man's face that I won't be here long."

"G'way, Punch, don' talk dataway. I know, 'dout yo' sayin' a word, dat yo' didn' had nuttin' ter do wid hit. But 'tain' while ter fool 'roun' heah, ef

yo' uver spec' ter be freed, an' dat's de truf. Yo' is gwine ter git clear yit," said Jude cheerfully, with a smile that was a God-send to the unhappy wretch in his prison.

"God bless you, Jude. You make me so ashamed of myself every time I see you. Oh, what a brute, a beast, a dog I've been, and to think you still care enough for me to come here! Here where those are kept that are soon to be led out to die a miserable and shameful death. Jude, you are so good to me! Jude, don't forget me, you are all I've got now." And then he kissed her through the cold iron gate of his cell, and in a moment she was gone.

Passing rapidly along the street, she stopped a brief while in the post-office. But during that short walk Wrong had waged battle against Right in her busy little brain, and once again Right had won. She had been debating whether to inform Julia of Still's presence in the neighborhood. She had thought also how villainously she had treated him whom she loved most in the world; but when she considered that Punch had been cured of his infatuation once and for all this time, she saw it would be unkind to inform her, while if she was told this woman might be saved from a wretched existence and a worse dissolution. She therefore entered the office for the express purpose of advising Julia of Still Lawson's presence in the county.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SEARCH.

Jude lost no time in going home, for she saw that if ever Punch was to be saved some evidence must be secured to prove that he was innocent, and if possible the guilt of some other person must be established. It was dark before John's slow-traveling wagon put down the anxious girl at the Morton house. Jude immediately went to Mrs. Morton and told of the result of Punch's trial, and announced her purpose of going to Richmond in search of some proof of Punch's innocence. Margaret Morton listened with sympathy to Jude's plans, but doubted if such a trip would do one bit of good, and she told her so.

"Nummin', 'tain' gwine do no harm ef hit don' do no good, an' nobody gwine be de loser by hit. I know pint'ly dat ef sumin' ain' dun Punch gwine be hung jes' es sho' es de sun gwine rise. I jes' know dat, 'ka'se de jedge dun say so."

"But, Jude, where are you goin' to get the money from to pay your expenses? You know you'll have your railroad fare to pay, and besides your board to pay while there."

"I know dat's er fac', Mis' Marg'ret," sighed Jude, for she had spent most of her money upon delicacies for Punch during his incarceration; "but den I kin ride twel my money gives out, den I kin walk

twel I git dar, den I know whar' I kin stay twel
I kin 'ten' ter de li'l' bizness I got ter do."

"But how will you ever come back again?"

"Dat's er fac', I ain' thought 'bout dat." And Jude's face assumed a look of bitter disappointment; then, covering her face with her apron, she sobbed convulsively. She stopped suddenly, and in the most excited manner, exclaimed with an air of triumph:

"Ef I cyarn' git back nay nur'r way, I kin walk,
fer I is jes' es sho' gwine ter Richmon' es dese feets
is ter ca'y me."

"My good, heroic girl! How I admire you, Jude. Go, and if you find anything that will help to free Punch, come back, and we will do everything we can for the poor boy. Here, take this money. It is all I have in the house, but it will pay your fare. I know Flournoy will think me very foolish to humor you, but I know you won't spend it uselessly. Now go to bed directly your supper is over, and be ready to start early in the morning."

"Thank Gawd, an' yo' too, Mis' Marg'ret," was the grateful girl's simple expression in showing her gratitude.

Supper was soon over, and the house in darkness by nine o'clock. Mr. Morton was away, so Mrs. Morton retired early. Jude knew that the down train to Richmond passed Cloverdale about one o'clock in the morning, so after going to her room she determined to go that very night, and not to wait till daylight. Hastily writing a short note to explain to Mrs. Morton her absence, she quickly dressed, for she knew it would be impossible to sleep a wink that night. She then slipped quietly out of the kitchen window. So softly did she effect her exit from the house, that not a dog was disturbed, and she walked swiftly away.

She traversed the ten miles to the station without an incident, nor did she feel much fatigued by her long nocturnal jaunt. Her journey to Richmond

was uneventful. The next morning she appeared suddenly before her old friend Charity Brown as she was in the midst of cooking her breakfast, and that old woman gave a gasp, her eyes grew enormous, and her mouth grinning with pleasure, she exclaimed:

"I hope I may die! Why, Jude, whar' in de name er Lawd did yo' drap fum," and she looked up as if expecting to see the hole in the ceiling through which Jude had found entrance into the room.

"I didn't cum dat way, Aun' Cha'ty," answered Judge mischievously. "An' de onliest reason dat yo' ain' hyeard me, wus dat yo' wus singin'."

"Humph, wus I? Waal I gits lonesome sum-times, an' jes' tries ter pass de time erway one way er nur'r. How yo' lef' all yo' home-folks, Jude?"

"Po'ly, po'ly, Aun' Cha'ty. I spec' yo' hyeard 'bout Jim, ain' yo'?"

"I ain' hyeard er Gawd's bref."

"Waal yo' know dey dun tuk him up fer murder."

"Whut!" and Charity's alarmed face showed how strong her attachment was for this young man. "G'way, Jude, yo' jokin'! Humph, Jim wouldn't er flea. Dat boy dus lek he's mean sum'times, but he ain' gwine hu't nobody. An' ef dey dun tuk him up dey better let him go 'fo' I git dar.

"Yo' jes' mus' be mistaken, Jude. Jim ain' lef' Richmon' no time hardly. 'Ka'se 'tain' no time since dat White gal tried to mek him ma'ay her. Yo' hyeard 'bout dat, ain' yo'?" Jude nodded.

"I know jes' es well es I stan'in' heah dat whut I tell yo' is de truf, 'ka'se I seed hit all wid my own eyes," replied Jude.

"Waal, waal, who would er thought dat he would er cum ter dat? Yo' p'tend ter tell me, Jude, dat hit dun been proved dat Jim dun hit; dus yo'?"

"Dat's whut er heap er folks say; but I won', I cyarn' b'lieve er wu'd un it. An' dat ain' all, I ain' gwine b'lieve hit, nur'r."

"Nur' dus I uther."

"Yass'm, hits er fac', de cote dun foun' him guilty, an' dey gwine fer ter hong him, too."

And the two cried heartily together to relieve their pent-up feelings. That is, Jude cried for this reason, and Charity cried out of sympathy for the girl and her sweetheart, for she, knowing woman that she was, long ago found that out.

When Jude had sufficient command of her voice she told of the circumstances connected with the crime, and the urgent necessity of securing the pawn ticket. Jude, in her eagerness to begin the search, scarcely ate any breakfast before she was looking fitfully about, as if expecting to see the little blue ticket posted in full view on the wall.

The search at last began, and the most rigid and painstaking care was taken, for it was quite possible that a life depended upon the result. Every cranny and corner of the dirty and unkempt old quarters was elaborately looked into, but not a thing was to be seen of it. Boxes and books were opened, pockets turned wrong side out, and search was made behind papers pasted on the walls, for perhaps it might have been placed there during the delirium of waiting upon the sick. All who have waited upon sick people are aware that many things are done unconsciously during the long drowsy watch.

When night came there was still nothing to be seen of the precious slip of paper. The two women had sought all day long without a morsel of dinner. Books were turned a leaf at a time, until it had grown so dark that Charity said:

"Git up dar, Jude, an' strek a light. Matches is dar by de lamp on de lef' han' side er de mant'l piece. I'se gittin' mighty no'count dese days." Charity sat flat upon the floor, which was littered in the most outlandish manner, the room looking as if preparations were being made to move.

Jude struck a match, and while waiting for it to catch well, a little slip of paper on the mantle

caught her eye. She read it by the feeble light, found it to be what she sought, and forgetting to light the lamp, dropped the match, exclaiming:

"Thank Gawd! Thank Gawd! I dun found hit at lars'!"

Jude felt just then that she was the most thankful being under heaven, and she uttered a prayer that at least this much had been accomplished toward proving her lover innocent.

"Yo' jes' wait, Aun' Cha'ty. I'll be back heah 'fo' yo' kin say scat."

With these words Jude seized a shawl and was down stairs in a wink, and off in the direction of the pawn-shop. Every square she inquired where the place was to avoid losing time, and presently bounced into the shop in such a noisy way as to arouse the ire of its testy proprietor.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I cum fer ter git whut dis ticket calls fer," answered Jude.

"Well, it has been sold," said the broker impatiently. "I can't keep a pledge forever."

"I know dat, seh," replied Jude meekly, for she was afraid the broker might refuse to answer a most vital question if she irritated him, so she asked, as if expecting a refusal: "Would yo' min' tellin' me, please, seh, whut dis piece er paper called fer?"

"The pledge was a pistol; but I sold it several weeks ago to a young man," was the reply.

"I s'pos'n yo' dunno who 'twus, dus yo', seh?"

"Why, confound you, how in the name of Satan do you think I can remember everybody's name that I deal with, even if I knew them! I never forget a face, but I don't try to remember names."

"Dus yo' reckon yo' could reckerlek de man yo' sol' dat pistol ter?"

"Yes; but what do you want to know so much for?"

"Nuttin' much. I jes' wan' ter fin' who 'twus dat

got dat pistol, 'ka'se 'twarn' mine. Waal, gimme de ticket den, please, seh."

The ticket was returned and she departed, not, however, before getting the name of the proprietor by heart; that is, the letters in consecutive order, for she did not even attempt to pronounce it, because the broker was a Russian, and she couldn't have uttered his name however much she might have tried. When she got to Charity's she found a pencil, and wrote the name and address down, and so unburdened her memory, remarking as she did so:

"Dat man look lek hit gwine tek all de letters in de book fer ter spell he name. No wunder he gits crabbed when folks talk ter him, when he got ter say all dat when he jes' call hese'f."

Jude was overjoyed at having accomplished so much and in so short a time, and being so content with her progress, she ate a hearty supper and fell asleep in her chair when it had been finished. Charity did not even try to suppress a few tears that trickled down her cheeks as she surveyed the tired and exhausted girl sleeping quietly, for hers was a kindly heart, and she softened immediately when she saw any living thing suffering, whether mentally or physically.

Jude was aroused before long to go to bed, which she had not done for at least forty-eight hours. It is quite needless to say that she slept till daylight.

Breakfast had been prepared by the faithful Charity long before Jude opened her eyes, and the two ate together and talked over the plans for the day.

"Now, Jude, I wan'ter know whut yo' gwine do nex'?"

"I'm gwine back home on de fus' train dat kin ca'y me, dat's whut."

"Whut, yo' ain' gwine lef' me es soon es dat, is yo'? Why, I ain' seed yo' good yit."

"Yass'm; but yo' got ter go too, Aun' Cha'ty, 'ka'se we all cyarn' git erlong 'dout yo'."

"G'way, gal! Whut dus I know dat'll do er bit er good?"

"I dunno; but yo' jes' got ter go wid me, dat's all dar is 'bout hit. I gwine pay yo' way. 'Ka'se we mout wan' yo', an' den yo'll be right dar."

Charity was persuaded to go, nor did it take much effort on Jude's part to induce her to consent, for she had been raised in the country, and had long wished for a sight of it again. So her mind was made up, and immediate preparation was made for the start.

They were interrupted in their occupation by a rap on the door.

"Cum in," said Charity.

"Good-mornin'," said the visitor, who was none other than Julia.

"'Mornin'," said Charity coldly, while Jude nodded her greeting.

"Whut do yo' wan' heah, 'ooman? Don' yo' know I ain' gwine have nuttin' ter do wid yo' arter whut yo' dun dun?"

The young woman seemed momentarily abashed, but quickly regaining her self-confidence, asserted it in a way that would have commanded a hearing almost anywhere.

"I simply came here to ask a question or two, Mrs. Brown, that is all. I don't ask you to do anything for me more than that."

"Whut is hit, den?"

"I just got a letter from somebody by the name of Jude Williams, who wrote me that Still Lawson was in her neighborhood, an—"

"Yo' she devil, yo'! Ef yo' is Julia White, I'm er good min' ter bus' yo' brains out right now!" exclaimed Jude, her eyes aflame with indignation at the remembrance of the wrong that had been perpetrated upon Punch.

Julia seemed little disturbed at this sudden out-

break of Jude's, and looked curiously, nay, even contemptuously, at the indignant girl, who seemed more and more inflamed by Julia's cool imperturbability.

"Who are you, woman, that you have no more to do than pick a quarrel with me? I have never seen you before in all my life."

"Stop dat fuss right now, bofe un yo'," interposed Charity. "Say whut yo' got ter say, Julia, an' den g'way fum heah, an' don' yo' lemme see yo' darken my do' ag'in es long es yo' got bref in yo' body; now."

"As I was goin' to say, the writer of the letter I spoke about forgot to give me the name of the post-office, and I am uncertain where to go, as even the post-mark is so indistinct that I can't make it out,"

"I'm Jude Williams. I written dat letter, an' 'twus mo' out er pity den love fer yo' dat I dun hit. Ef yo' wan'ter know whar' dat black rascal is, I'll tell yo'; he's still er hangin' roun' home; dat is, he wus de lars' time I seen him."

"And your home is where?" asked Julia coldly.

"Hit's nigh Clov'dale, at Mis' Flo'noy Morton's place."

"That's all I wanted to know. I am sorry I caused bad feelin's by comin' here this mornin', but you know, Miss Williams, I came to see Mrs. Brown, and happened to find you. I couldn't guess what made you speak to me as you did until you told me your name; but now I remember your friend Mr. Brooks told me about you. Maybe he is still your friend." Julia sighed as she finished this speech, and began again before Jude could say anything.

"I know, that is, I see now, how wrong I did Jim Brooks. I see now how mean and lowlifeted I've been, but I was weak, and I thought Jim would marry me, and everything would be all right. I know how wrong I have done, but I had every

reason to resort to some means to save my reputation."

There was a noise of grating teeth in the still room, and when Julia looked at Jude she was glaring at her like a maddened panther. Other than this display of anger, she made no motion.

"Now that I know where Still Lawson is, I'll find him out; then I'll show him something or other."

Julia's voice had grown unnatural as she spoke of this reprobate. A little while later, as Jude and Charity talked together of her visit, both had been mollified toward the outcast, and spoke kindly of her, and Jude felt extremely glad that she had sent the letter then.

That evening, toward sunset, the train whirred into the little village of Cloverdale with its usual bustle and confusion, which, like a billow, arose from silence to a bedlam, and then subsided again to its usual equanimity, all within the space of five minutes.

Jude and Charity were the only passengers for the station, so they entered the waiting-room, more, probably, out of idle curiosity than to rest. Luckily John happened to be at the station that day, so Jude had his promise to take them home. While they were waiting for John to hitch his horse, Jude made a careful survey of the room in which the tragedy had taken place, and although the room had been carefully cleaned afterwards, her sharp eyes noticed something gleaming white in one of the wide cracks in the floor. Curiosity prompted her to pry it out with a stick, so without appearing to be doing anything else than idly poking in the crack, she presently was successful in disclosing—what, but a human tooth, or rather a part of one; for it was a fragment broken diagonally across. Without saying a word she carefully secreted the precious fragment, for she had good and valid reason for believing it a most valuable addition to her evidence of somebody else's guilt.

The ride home in John's wagon was accomplished without an incident worthy of record. As it was late before they arrived, Jude and her companion found lodging that night at John's home.

Next morning Jude was at her accustomed place in Mrs. Morton's kitchen, much to its owner's surprise, who little thought that Jude could possibly have returned so soon.

"Why, Jude, when did you get back?" she asked.
"Lars' night."

"Now what made you run away that night and go to Richmond without telling anybody? If you had told me, I would have found some way to send you, even that night. Next morning, when I didn't hear you down stairs, I guessed what you had done; and sure enough it was true. Well, no harm was done, I hope."

"None dat I knows un," replied Jude. An' dat ain' all, I warn' gwine ax yo' fer ter sen' me dat long ways in de night, fer de Lawd knows yo' bin good 'nuff ter me. An' den I knowed I couldn' er sleep er wink, an' I thought ter myse'f I jes' es well be travelin' es layin' dar in de baid battin' er my eyes an' tryin' fer ter sleep. So I gits up an' sneaks down sta'rs, an' wus gone 'fo' even eny de houn's hyea. d me."

"Tell me, Jude, for I'm mighty anxious to know, if you found anything that will help to set Punch free."

"I don' know, marm, 'bout dat; but I foun' dis much, an' dat wus Punch didn't r'deem de pledge."

And she promptly showed the pawn ticket.

"Humph, is that all? Well, I don't see what good that will do."

"Nummin' 'bout dat. Hit gwine fetch him out'n jail, dat whut hit gwine do," replied Jude.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE NEW TRIAL.

Jude, that very day after her return home, took the first opportunity to go to the court-house. Arrived there, she found Punch's attorney, who promptly told her that a new trial had been refused, and the course of the law would be pursued unless she appealed to the Governor.

Jude choked with deep and bitter disappointment, and almost forgot, in her distress, to say that which she had come expressly for the purpose of saying, but she gave the lawyer the pawn ticket and the fragment of the tooth, which she at that moment held more precious than jewels.

"Why, Jude, what are these?" asked the lawyer.

"Don' yo' reckerlek 'bout dat?" pointing to the ticket. "Dat's de ve'y ticket Jim Brooks got fer de pistol dey all say he kilt Henry wid. Now, ain' dat ernuff ter prove he didn' have hit? Ain' hit?"

"Yes, but he might have gotten somebody else to buy it for him."

"Yas, seh; but 'tain' no use fer s'posin' whut ain' nuver happen'd. Punch ain' seen dat pistol arter he lef' dat pawnshop 'twel de night Henry wus kilt."

"Very well, let's believe so, anyhow. Now what's this?"

"Dat ain' nuttin' but er piece er toof dat I foun' in de same room whar' Henry dece'sted."

"So you think we can get a new trial for Jim on the strength of this slim evidence. The ticket won't prove that he did not get somebody else to buy the pistol. And as for the piece of tooth, that is of no account at all unless you can prove some connection between it and the murderer."

The unhappy and disconsolate girl turned away, almost heart-broken at the apparent indifference of the lawyer. The facts were just these: The lawyer was one of those men who had become in time hardened toward human suffering, while even the present case scarce moved his sympathy a single jot. Then he was too indolent to arouse himself to the conscientious performance of his duty. So Jude went out of his office with an aching heart. She did not yet trust herself in Punch's presence, but instead made her way to the judge's house, where, rapping modestly on the door, she was soon admitted by the judge himself.

She was so confused at being confronted by the very individual she had come to see, that she stammered forth:

"Good mornin', seh. Is dis de Jedge?"

"Yes; what do you want?" he asked.

"Waal, seh, I jes' cum fer ter talk ter yo' 'bout Jimi."

"Jim, Jim who? There are ten thousand Jims."

The judge was in no temper to talk, since the dinner bell had just rung.

"I mean Jim Brooks, seh."

"Yes, that black rascal that is to hang this day week for a willful and cowardly murder."

"Good Gawd! Marse Jedge, 'tain' gwine ter be es soon es dat, is hit? Lawd, Lawd! Whut I gwine ter do?"

"Go home, and think no more about the villain. He's not worth it."

"Yas, seh, he is. Dat boy is jes' es innocent' er doin' dat es yo' or me is. An', Jedge, I cum heah fer de purpose er axin' fer er new trial fer dat boy.

I knows whut I'se er talkin' 'bout. Please, seh, Jedge, try him jes' onest mo'."

"I have already told you, woman, that I wouldn't try this case again. Now it's useless for you to keep asking. The boy has deserved to die, and I'll certainly not hinder the carrying out of the sentence. Now go."

"Hol' on, Jedge! Fer Gawd's sake, hol' on!" And Jude, in her utter despair, flung herself down and in desperation clasped the judge's knees.

"Fer de sake er jestice, Marse Jedge, heah whut I got ter say! I ain' got much sense, an' I cyarn' tell yo' jes' lek I wan'ter, but sum er dese days yo'se gwine be stan'in' 'fo' er Jedge, an' yo' mout not have even er soul ter plead fer yo', an' den s'posin' de Jedge sen' yo' 'way 'dout heahin' whut yo' got ter say, whut yo' gwine do den?"

Jude paused for breath, and the judge flushed and seemed annoyed, for it is often difficult, nay, even impossible, to controvert the simple argument of the untutored, and little children. It was so in this instance. The judge was moved by the singular devotion of the young woman, and by her sincerity. Her usual diffidence for the nonce was flung aside, which could scarcely have been believed, even by herself, in soberer moments.

"Here! Get up, get up!" commanded the judge.

"Please, seh, Jedge, ef jes' fer dis time, promise me yo' will see de boy has ernur'r trial, 'ka'se I dun foun' out sumin' dat nobody ain' know'd b'fo', an' I'se jes' es sho' hit gwine free him es I is stan'in' heah."

Jude had risen to her feet, and hung upon the judge's reply as if her whole life and eternal happiness depended upon what he was going to say.

"Why don't you go to Brook's lawyer, woman? He is the one to see," replied the judge.

"I dun bin ter him er r'ady, an' he say whut I dun found out ain' worth shucks. But I ain' gwine b'lieve dat, I don' keer who say so. I know dis

much, ef dey summons de witnesses I say, an' ef I could git ev'ybody fer ter put faith in whut I say, an' jes' use dey hails a leetle, I know Punch could be freed."

"What have you found out, then?" asked the judge, somewhat interested in the girl, who undoubtedly was the most persistent and determined that he had ever come across.

Jude briefly went over the result of her town trip, and asked that when the trial was again undertaken that Charity Brown and the pawnbroker be summoned.

"But I haven't yet said a new trial would be granted."

"I know dat, too; but I kin tell dat dar is gwine be ernur'r trial, jes es well es ef yo' dun say so."

"I don't know yet, but you go down in the kitchen and wait. You can get some dinner there, too, and as soon as I am through mine I'll see what can be done."

Jude's thankfulness was quite too profound for her voice to be trusted, so she gave an awkward nod, her eyes brimming with happy tears as she made her exit.

The judge, after dinner, had a talk with Punch's lawyer, and with the attorney for the Commonwealth, and after the usual form had been observed, a new trial was ordered for the condemned. Instead of having to suffer the next week for a crime that he did not do, Jude surprised and gladdened the heart of the prisoner by telling him that a new trial had been granted him at the next term of court, which was several weeks off. She carefully concealed from him the fact that she alone was instrumental in securing even this reprieve. After remaining with the prisoner a short time, she left for home.

It was only a few days after Jude's return home that there was a halloo at the gate, and when she went to inquire who it was she found Julia, who

had taken the precaution to bring a justice of the peace along, for she was in search of Still Lawson.

"Well, here I am, Miss Jude. You know what I've come for, don't you?"

"Not adzackly," was the reply.

"Well, I am lookin' for Still Lawson. You know you told me he was somewhere near here."

"Yass, but dat man is jes' es slick es er eel. He's leah ter-day an' gone ter-morrow."

"When did you see him last?"

"I don' b'lieve I seen him since de trial er Jim. Gawd knows I kin do 'dout seein' him twel Gab'r'el blows his horn, ef 'twarn' fer 'commodatin' er yo' an' gittin' my own cu'os'ty satisfied."

"Why, what do you want to know about him? I thought you hated him."

"Dat I dus, wuss'n er rattl'snake. But nummin' 'bout yo'. Jes' wait er minit an' I'll sho' yo' whar' he bin stayin'."

Jude ran back to the house, and told Mrs. Morton she was going out a little while, and in a few minutes returned, saying:

"Cum on, I'll show yo' de house. But I wan'ter tell yo' all one thing, ef dat man see yo' cumin', fyar' yo' well. Yo' ain' gwine see nuttin' er 'im but his heels. Yo'all jes' hol' on. I'se gwine fus', an' ef I see he's at de house I gwine motion ter yo', an' den—den yo' kin ketch him."

The justice approved of her plan as sound strategy; accordingly, Jude went up the path to the house as if she intended to stop. Still sat in the door reading a book, and looked up as he heard the crunching of gravel on the path. To his surprise, it was she whom he had tried every means to encompass and had failed. The house was quiet, and nobody was there but himself. Now was the time. As she was about to pass the door along the path, he said:

"Good evenin'."

With subdued wrath, Jude looked him full in the

face, and without a word passed on. As she reached the corner of the house furthest from Still, she gave the signal, which of course was not seen by him. She continued her pace slowly, until stopped by the near approach of Still.

"Ain' I dun tol' yo' ha'f er dozen times ter lemme 'lone, man," said Jude, turning upon him, her eyes dancing at the approaching culmination of her triumph over her enemy.

Still evidently took the girl's words at men's usual valuation of feminine admonitions, and instead of believing them, believed her eyes instead. A smile that boded no good to the young woman's good name showed to her that one of his teeth was gone, a thing she had not been certain of before. Still approached nearer, and would have taken her in his arms had she not eluded him by a quick and sudden turn, and he in his attempt to capture her, stumbled headlong into the justice's arms.

"Here, I want you," said the officer as he drew forth a warrant from his pocket and read it to him. It was issued upon the complaint of Julia White, and was for betrayal. As the officer finished reading, Still gave a great sigh of relief. He had thought the warrant for something else.

Julia came up at this moment, and taunted Still by saying:

"You thought you had hidden so well that time that I would never find you, eh? Well, you see I have, and I mean to see that you do for me and yours all that the law demands. You hear that, don't you?"

"What does this woman want?" demanded Still of the justice.

"How do I know. I've never seen her before, and all that I know is stated in the warrant."

"What, and you pretend to take me up on the charge of a common woman like that? That woman has as many lovers as care to spend money on her. She has found herself in trouble, and more

than once has tried to settle herself upon some simpleton who will be fool enough to marry her and father her child; but she hasn't found him yet, for I'll be blamed if I'll be snatched up and obliged to marry a woman like her."

Julia was astounded to hear such a denunciation from her former lover, for she could recollect no cause for his unwarranted speech except the affair in which Punch was concerned, and she was not aware that he knew of that.

She flushed with shame more than once at the allegations of Still, and then paled with anger, until she was almost livid, at the heaping up of falsehoods, that presently caused her to burst forth into such a mad passion that there was no restraining her.

"You impudent hound! You stand up here and tell me to my face the blackest lies that ever anybody thought of. I'll swear and kiss the Bible that you are my child's father! You coward, vagabond, snake in the grass; dog, you! Here you ran away from Richmond to keep from marryin' me; but I reckon you see by now that the law's arm is longer than you thought. And I'll see you marry me now just for spite; but I hate you, I hate you, Still Lawson, worse than I do a scorpion!"

When Julia ceased speaking, Still, without appearing to notice her, coolly asked of the justice:

"Where do you propose to take me? I'm tired of hearin' this woman's tongue."

"Just as well come on to the court-house," said the justice.

So to the wagon they went, and were soon out of sight. The two young women entered the cabin, and remained until its owner returned, when she was told of the events that had just occurred, and accommodation was asked for by Julia that she might remain until court-day.

Leave to remain was readily granted by the kind-hearted old soul, for nobody, however evil-handed

or undeserving, applied to her in vain. So for a time we shall leave them.

Jude, on the following morning, declared to Mrs. Morton that it was absolutely necessary for her to go to the court-house again. So she persuaded John to take her, although the poor man had almost driven his mule to death since Punch had been taken up.

Once at the court-house, she sought Punch's lawyer, showed him the fragment of tooth in the most mysterious manner imaginable, and then said:

"Now yo' jes cum on wid me, an' I gwine show yo' whar' dis piece er toof cum fum."

They went to the jail, sought and obtained entrance to see the prisoners, and since Still could not obtain bail, he was kept a prisoner there. He lay upon his bed in one corner of his cell when they entered, but curiosity prompted him to look up to see who it was. Recognizing who it was, he turned away his head and ignored their presence.

"Tek dis, please, seh," said Jude to the turnkey, "an' ax him ef hit's his'n."

The jailer did so, and called Still to the barred door. He came reluctantly, and saw the glistening fragment in the officer's hand. Instantly he saw the desperate situation he was in. The destruction of the fragment was his hope, then every evidence would be destroyed that he had anything to do with the murder. With the desperation of one in his extremity he threw the fragment out of the man's hand with a vile curse.

"What in the devil's name have you all hatched up now, that you come here to pester me with every scrap of tooth, china or what not. Just because I have broken a tooth off in the last few days, you come here to ask if it is mine, I suppose?"

As the broken tooth fell to the stone floor, Still did his utmost to stamp it to powder under his heel; but it rebounded through the barred door, and Jude snatched it up with the quickness of a hawk.

When Still saw what a display he had made of his folly, he was distracted with himself. He did all upon the impulse of the moment without for a moment considering the sharp-eyed witnesses present.

The jailer then asked:

"Here, let me see if this piece fits the broken tooth in your mouth."

"Humph, you must think I'm a fool!" said Still, in the most insolent and surly manner. "What do you reckon I'm goin' to let you put your dirty hand and somebody's nasty tooth in my mouth for, eh?"

"Shut up, you impudent blackguard!" exclaimed the jailer as he strode away, followed by the others. "What did you want to find if this tooth fitted the broken part in that rascal's mouth for?" asked he after he had gotten outside the jail.

"Because," said Punch's lawyer, "he may be guilty of this murder that my client is charged with."

"You had better say is guilty of," remarked the jailer.

"Well, you know the tooth was found in the room where the fellow Henry was killed."

"That's enough. You all just wait, and— Come here, boy. Run over there and tell Doctor Anders to come over here a minute if he is not busy." This to a boy passing along the court green.

The doctor was a dentist, and he presently came over, asked what was wanted, and the three together entered the jail—the lawyer, the dentist, and jailer. To what conclusion the dentist came was not made known to Jude until the day of the trial. For although Jude and John patiently waited without the jail until the three had returned, they gave no satisfaction to the anxious watchers.

The day of the second trial duly came, and the same motley crowd, with few variations, filled the court-room to the degree of making the spectators faint.

Punch went through the same form as before, and as he stood up before the court everybody could see the change that had been wrought by the several weeks of confinement, along with the attending anxiety and suspense.

His face looked ashen and gloomy, but his voice was resonant and steady.

The pawnbroker was the first person called as a witness. After the preliminary questions the Commonwealth's attorney asked :

"Do you know the prisoner?"

"No."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At the time he pawned a certain pistol."

"You never saw him before, nor since, that time?"

"No."

"Is this the pistol that was pawned?"

"It looks like it, but I cannot positively say."

"Would you be able to identify the person you sold the pistol to? Because you sold it, I understand."

"Yes."

"You are sure about this?"

"Very sure; I rarely forget a face."

The broker gave such lucid answers to all that was asked him that he was soon told to stand aside.

Jude was then called. She was so enthused that the lawyers had somewhat of a task to keep her to the questions propounded. She was asked to give her reasons for suspecting Still Lawson, to which she replied:

"Jes' 'ka'se he's so lowlif'ted; dat's hucom I know he dun hit."

"But you can't get the jury to convict anybody on such a simple statement as that," replied the attorney who had been engaged by Still.

"Yo' jes' bring him in dis cote, an' tain' gwine be

but er minit b'fo' ev'ybody gwine see dat he's de ve'y one dat dun hit."

Still was brought into the court-room, and as he made his appearance at one of the side doors, in charge of an officer, everybody tried to see him. He sensibly paled under the curious scrutiny of the crowd, and as he strode across the room he felt a queer sensation of lassitude and fatigue that was unaccountable. When he had been sworn, and was asked to give an account of his knowledge concerning Jim Brooks, his wits seemed to have taken leave of him entirely. He repeatedly contradicted himself, and when Punch's lawyer asked:

"I see you have a tooth broken off. How came that?"

The wretched fellow smiled a sickly smile, and pointed inquiringly with a tremulous finger to the vacancy.

"I did that eating a piece of steak."

"Where?"

"In the waitin'-room at Cloverdale."

"Where did you get the steak?"

"I brought it in a snack, when I came from Richmond last."

"But how do you explain that the tooth was broken off several weeks after you left Richmond last? Your tooth was lately broken. It was broken at Cloverdale one night while you were there, that is easily proven."

He was trapped, seeing which he preserved a sullen silence to all questioning.

The doctor was then called, and he testified that the broken tooth fitted accurately along the broken surface, and was therefore the missing portion.

The broker was brought upon the stand again, and when asked:

"Did you ever see this man before?"

The Russian rubbed his eye-glasses, put them on, and said:

"Yes."

"Where, and when?"

"Oh, two months ago maybe, in my store."

"Was it he that bought this pistol?" asked the attorney.

"Yes."

"You lie, you foreign scum! I've never seen you before in—"

"Order in this court!" thundered the wrathy judge. "Take that man out of here," he ordered.

Still Lawson was led out of the crowded room and to his cell, and later the charge against him was changed from betrayal to murder.

By the setting of the sun the argument on both sides had been closed. The jury had gone out, and the dim, smoky lamps were lighted by a shuffling attendant, and yet the crowd hung in breathless suspense with eyes fixed upon the door leading into the jury-room.

There was a shuffle of feet, a chair slid on the floor, the door opened, and the crowd whispered:

"Here they come."

The room was very still, and as the jury filed into place the foreman remained standing. In response to the usual question, he said:

"We, the jury, according to the evidence heard, find James Brooks not guilty of the murder of Henry Baker, and therefore acquit him of all charges."

There was a general acclamation of delight, which almost drowned the voice of the judge, who drummed loudly on his desk for order. Everybody crowded about Punch to shake hands and to congratulate him.

But there was one shrinking figure on the outer edge of the crowd that looked on admiringly, feeling thankful that her work had been so well rewarded. Punch looked about for her, espied her at last, and with a bound that almost overturned several curious worthies, he took her in his arms and kissed her gratefully, passionately, their tears wet-

ting each other's cheeks. As for Jude, she nestled into his bosom with the halcyon feeling of childhood, when she knew he loved her so well, where for one brief minute her head lay in utmost peace and content. Then together they went out of that horrid torture chamber, where both had experienced the most bitter and, at the same time the sweetest, moments of their lives. .

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

Punch, while waiting for his father to bring the wagon out to take them home, walked with Jude along the verdant green of the Court-house Square in the deepening twilight. The full moon had just appeared above the horizon, and the two happy creatures, secluding themselves from the crowd, hastened away to be alone.

As they walked along, Punch first began the subject uppermost in the hearts of each, for he had seemed preoccupied, and his thoughts appeared to wander until now, when he began by saying:

“Jude, by the merest chance in the world I have been saved from an unjust and shameful death. I didn’t know, until I had a talk with old Aunt Charity, that anybody in the world thought enough of me to do what you have done, Jude. I know I haven’t deserved such service from you, Jude, and it makes me see myself as an ungrateful, hard-hearted and rascally brute.”

“Now, now, I ain’ gwine heah a bit mo’,” began Jude, but Punch interrupted her.

“Tain’t while to stop me, Jude. I know now, after I look back and see what you have done for me, when I remember how badly I have treated you, even after you were with me when I was sick, when I went a runnin’ after Julia White like a blamed fool, and she was doin’ her best to ruin me

in every way that she could. But I've come to my senses at last, my little girl, though I'm afraid I am too late. All the time I've been foolin' my time and money away down there in Richmond I failed to see what a true woman was. Ah, well! we never know what fools we'll make until we are finished. Jude, do you think you could make up your mind to have a man who had mistreated you, who had neglected you for a less worthy woman, who rewarded your devotion with forgetfulness? Do you?"

"I dunno. All depends on de man. Ef I loved him, dat wouldn't er kep' me sum lovin' him dat much mo', 'ka'se 'tain' no love dat cyarn' stan' er few licks now an' den, an' ef mine cyarn' stan' mo'n dat, I ain' gwine gin hit ter er man I wan'ter ma'ay, dats er sho' thing."

"Then because I've made the mistake all these years in supposin' myself a little too good for a girl from the country, you do not hate me?"

"Dus yo' s'posin' I gwine bre'k my naik trapesin' up an' down de country ef I hated yo', boy? Yo' talk jes' lek yo' ain' got good sense," retorted Jude, with a pout, and a mischievous dimple chasing itself away in her rounded cheek as she slyly looked up at him out of the corner of her eyes.

That was quite enough. The look was one of devotion for the stalwart fellow, and he saw it. Instantly they were in each other's arms, and he was asking:

"Then you do love me! Don't you, Jude?"

"Whut yo' s'posin' I bin er doin' uver since I dunno when?"

This was the nearest approach to an admission direct that she loved him that Punch was ever able to get from the devoted woman, who had exhibited it to such a marvelous degree in other ways.

Hearing the voice of his father calling him, Punch arose from the ground, and together the happy pair walked away in the brilliant moonlight, and were soon on their way home.

During the ride Punch unfolded to his father plans of his for the future. He had fully made up his mind never to return to the city again to live, and although the manager of the insurance company wrote to him more than once, inducing him to return to his old position at an increase of salary, he positively refused to leave, giving as an excuse for his apparent obstinacy that—

"In town you've got to work yourself half to death to hold a situation, or starve if you haven't got one. If you acquire any property, everybody is willing to help you spend it, and become enemies after it is gone. You marry a wife and establish a home, and delight in your family, and along comes a devil in the dress of a man, and you find your home ruined and yourself a heart-broken and blood-thirsty man. Of the thousands and thousands of negroes who rush off to the cities, many, very many, find wretched dens in the lowest and vilest quarters of the towns, where disease slays them like a pestilence. In the country it is different. Everybody can find plenty in the country to eat, if they will work; the air is pure, and the ignorant are not led into vicious habits and wheedled out of money (little enough they have, God knows) by smooth-talkin' agents of every breed and description. If the good Lord will forgive me for this time, I'll never be caught doin' the like any more."

John was never in a better humor than when he reached home the night of the trial. He aroused every mother's son with the racket he made, he was so overjoyed at Punch's acquittal; which, followed by the additional good news that he expected to marry and settle down in the country, almost made him shout like a child, such was his superabundance of joy.

As he handed Jude from the wagon with elaborate but awkward courtesy, he gave her a rousing

buss on the lips, that set off one of those jolly laughs that was an index to her character.

John even ventured so far as to greet Elvira in the same manner, to be repaid with a sound slap, that made his ear tingle, and the sharp—

“Gre’t fathers, John, yo’ mus er had too much. Whut marter’d yo’ nigger?”

When he had sufficiently calmed down, they had a cold supper together, and Jude went straight to Mrs. Morton’s and acquainted her of Punch’s acquittal, and both women shed tears together, as they sometimes will do, and then a moment after laugh at their folly, if folly we can call it.

We had almost forgotten to mention with what intense interest and anxiety Charity had followed the trial, and how her passions had been excited to an intense degree during the trying hours. She had repeatedly declared she knew she would never get over it, but she did. For aught we know she is still living in the same quarters on Eighteenth Street.

Charity did not leave John’s house, however, until Jude and Punch had been married, which event occurred a few weeks after they had come to a mutual understanding. This culmination of Jude’s hopes seemed to please her to such a degree that she could talk of little else beforehand.

The next term of court tried Still Lawson for the murder of Henry, and it was so clearly established that he was the murderer that he made a full confession of the fact, and threw himself on the mercy of the court, after vainly trying to establish a plea of self-defense. Enough was in doubt, however, to mitigate the sentence of murder in the first degree, which had been Punch’s sentence, to one in the second degree, which saved the scoundrel’s neck, at any rate.

When Julia saw the turn of affairs the day of the trial, and that Still was implicated in the murder, if not directly guilty, she saw at once the futility of

ever expecting marriage with Still, which under the circumstances would be out of the question. Without so much as bidding farewell to her former lover, she had gone away—John, nor Punch, nor Jude knew whither. Heart-sick, forlorn, outcast, and truly miserable, she found a seat in a passing wagon, the driver of which had sufficient courtesy to offer her a ride when he saw her trudging along the road alone. She had started away from the court-house aimlessly, not knowing, nor caring, for that matter, where she was going. When she had seated herself in the wagon, she asked:

“Where are you goin’?”

“I gwine stop at er place jes’ dis side er Clov’dale,” he replied.

“Will you let me ride as far as you go then?”

“Whar yo’ gwine?”

“To Cloverdale, where I’ll take the night train to Richmond.”

“Dat I will,” said the fellow generously. Nor did he pull up his team until the station itself was reached.

On the way they whiled away the time by talking of the trial, which had such a depressing effect upon the wretched girl’s feelings that she was indeed glad when the station was reached. Once in Richmond, she went straight to Florence’s home, where the disappointed and chagrined woman’s insouiance gave place to alternate hysterical outbursts of passion and crying. During the while Florence tried to reason with her into viewing her misfortune philosophically, but she would listen to nothing, so she gave it up and waited. Julia in a few days appeared to become more resigned to her ill luck, and seemed more cheerful. Several months elapsed, and then there came a little visitor, unwelcome; undesired, but unprevented, to share in the sorrows and pain of this old world.

Julia had wished herself dead hundreds of times before the little creature was born, but she ap-

peared to desire it now more than ever. Since her disgrace was so apparent, so glaring, she resolved one night, while she lay awake in the little room which had been hers since the child was born, that she would assume her place in the ranks of those poor outlawed, degraded beings who have been put far beyond the pale of respectability, and whose utter despair none can pretend to know.

Without waking Florence, she arose from her bed and dressed, then, taking the child, she wrapped it up snugly and placed it in a basket, and groped her way out of the house which she was destined forever to enter no more. When out of doors she wended her way along the quiet streets, taking infinite care not to be seen by any one. At last, after walking at least two miles or more to a remote part of the city, she stopped, sat down on the curbstone, and nursed her child for the last time.

Heavy thoughts were hers as she sat there and watched the infant, so innocent and so peacefully sleeping, while her brain was in a frightful turmoil as she considered the step she was taking. Presently she began talking to herself:

"God knows I'm so wretched, but I'm decided not to take my child, innocent as she is, where I know she will in time follow in my footsteps. But when I leave her in the hands of strangers, how will they care for her? Ah, many are the bruises and heart-aches we get in this hard world, my child; your miserable mother has found it so, and hers before her drank deeply of the cup of bitterness. I pray God that you may be spared the unhappy life that has been the lot of us both. Foolish woman that I was, I trusted in the one I loved, and he deceived me and spurned me from him like a— Well, like the thing I am, and will be henceforth. So must it be. I have chosen my way, and that is to perdition. My father's blood in me gives me to understand that I can't hold my head up without

shame wherever I go, so I am already a nameless wretch."

How strange it was to think of this young woman, who but a few months before had been the most admired and courted of her acquaintances, now a young mother, seated alone with her child in a distant part of the city, and giving utterance to such a despairing monologue. Truly Fortune does sometimes play queer tricks with us.

After a while Julia arose, tucked her infant warmly in the basket, covered it up carefully, then tripping lightly up the front steps of a most respectable-looking house she quietly placed her burden within the storm doors, and then looking to see if anybody was watching her, she stooped, softly drew back the covering, and kissed the child fervently. It stirred, but quickly became quiet. With tears wetting her face, Julia slowly descended the steps and was gone. Before she had gone very far the tears were dried on her cheeks, and both were flushed with excitement as she sought some balm for her sorrow in a neighboring whiskey shop. As she entered she might have been overheard to say, "Now to the devil!"

We will not pursue this unhappy creature's career one bit further. It will be quite sufficient to say that a few years after this night, Punch, passing along the streets while on a visit to the city, thought he recognized a certain drunken, debauched, and painted figure pass by, and wondered if it could be Julia. As he looked, she turned her head, and with an inebriate stare and vulgar leer looked straight into his face. She did not recognize him, nor did he in the least signify that he knew her. So, Julia's end seemed very near.

As for Don, he had been sent away from home to school, and from thence he went to find employment in New York, where, after living a few years, he grew tired and came home to manage the farm. When he heard of Punch's misfortune he hurried

home to be with his old-time playmate and companion. Unluckily Mrs. Morton had forgotten to inform him of his friend's arrest, so that is why he was not present at the first trial. None of his friends seemed to be more overjoyed than Don at Punch's acquittal.

In due course of time Don brought to the home of his father a bride, that to the happy youngster was as fair as the morning, and then he settled down to the happy and peaceful life of a Virginia farmer. Punch often came over to talk of former times, and the two appeared to be almost as happy when with each other as they had been in childhood.

Little Nelly has grown to be a saucy little minx, and we are much afraid she is beginning to have more thoughts of putting her hair up, and lengthening her dresses, than of her books.

To give in detail an account of what became of all the personages introduced in this history would be tedious, to say the very least, so we forbear. It is enough, perhaps, to say that nothing very remarkable occurred to disturb the tranquil harmony of conjugal life in Punch's household, save occasionally a question would arise as to who was chief of the family, which would be promptly decided by Punch asserting, whether with established right to do so or not, that he was.

"Waal, why don' yo' mek dese chillun min', den."

